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NEWSZINE

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RPGA NETWORK

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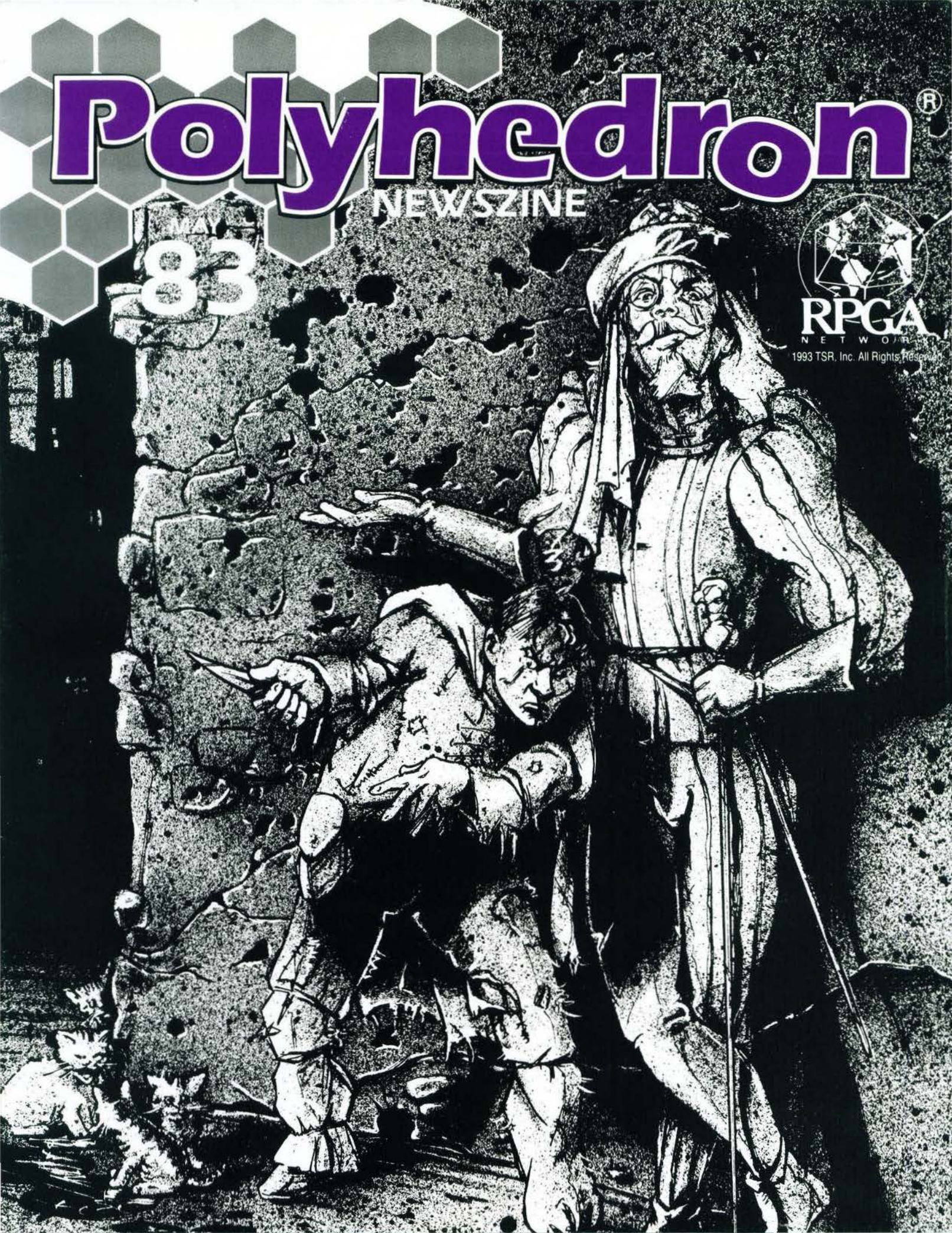

The Man Behind Drizzt

A Chat With Author R. A. Salvatore

by Erlene Mooney

R.A. Salvatore, author of more than a dozen books, will be the Network's Guest of Honor at the upcoming GEN CON® Game Fair. In addition to numerous book signings and seminars, he will speak at the Network's Breakfast.

Although Salvatore's schedule will be grueling (it always is at the Game Fair), he says the convention gives him a lift.

"It's a convention every writer needs," he said. "A writer can get pretty secluded. You sit at home and the world passes you by."

But at the Game Fair fans discuss his characters and where they would like to see them go.

Among his planned Game Fair activities will be a publishing fiction with TSR seminar, a seminar on the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting, at least one reading, and many opportunities to talk with fans. He hopes to even find time to judge the Network's skit competition Wednesday night before the convention starts and the Game Fair masquerade Saturday.

Salvatore's second hardback, *Starless Night,* will go on sale at the Game Fair. It is a sequel to *The Legacy,* which spent a month on the New York Times' Best Seller list.

"*Starless Night* takes place in the underdark. Drizzt is going home," Salvatore explained. "He's concerned about various events, and he's caught up in a grief he doesn't understand." The drow ranger blames himself for the death of Wulfgar.

The events in the book begin one week after *The Legacy.* In this book, Drizzt will share the spotlight with Catti-brie, Salvatore said. "She will grow tremendously in this story. She's one of the stars of this book."

A paperback version of *The Legacy* also will be available at the Game Fair. It contains an additional chapter at the end, one not in the hardback version.

Salvatore admits he never thought Drizzt Do'Urden would turn into a star. He originally was intended as a supporting character in *The Halfling's Gem.* However, the drow became a favorite of FORGOTTEN REALMS setting fans.

Drizzt also appears in Salvatore's books: *The Crystal Shard, Streams of Silver, Homeland, Exile,* and *Sojourn.* In addition, the drow is featured in "The Dark Mirror," a short story in the *Realms of Valor* book and the game product *Hall of Heroes.*

Other Drizzt books are planned, Salvatore said, such as another hardback that will come out in the late summer of 1994.

The Massachusetts resident receives 10 to 15 letters a week from fans. "I rarely get a letter that doesn't talk about Drizzt," he said.

Salvatore makes it a policy to personally answer every letter he receives, whether it is about Drizzt or the characters in "The Cleric Quintet" series. He is fond of the Quintet, which includes *Canticle, In Sylvan Shadows,* and *Night Masks,* all available now; *The Fallen Fortress,* which will go on sale in June; and *The Chaos Curse,* which will be available in the summer of 1994.

Salvatore is hard at work on another trilogy for ACE/Berkeley. The first book in the series, *The Woods Out Back,* will feature a protagonist based on himself. The hero is Gary Leger, a human who is working at a job Salvatore used to hold. "He's frustrated like I was. The scenes are real. Gary's mother's house is my mother's house."

He is excited about the trilogy, and he says "writing it is a riot. The book has so many neat twists and turns. It starts with Gary in the woods. He's reading *The Hobbit* when he gets kidnapped by a leprechaun and taken to the land of Faerie."

Gary is kidnapped because he is the perfect size for a suit of armor, Salvatore explained, adding an elf-crafted spear that is integral to the story can only be wielded by a human wearing that particular suit of armor. "It makes perfect sense why Gary was kidnapped," he said.

"It's the type of book where the heroes aren't always drawing their swords and cutting things up," he offered. "For example, what better way for a leprechaun to get rid of a band of goblins than to waggle his fingers and move all the trees three feet to the left. It's that kind of book."

The other books in that upcoming trilogy are called *Pot o' Gold,* and *The Haggis Hunter.*

Still another trilogy in the works is for Warner Books called "A Hero's Life." The first book in the series, *The Crimson Shadow,* will be out in December of this year. It will feature Luthien Bedwyr, a human who is part Spartacus and part Drizzt, Salvatore said.

Luthien's sidekick is a halfling swashbuckler named Oliver deBurrows. Salvatore explains there is a scene where Oliver is fighting a giant, and he carves an "O" in the giant's chest. "He says, 'I could've written my whole name. And I assure you, it's a long name.' "

Salvatore continues to think about plots. "I have a something I want to write for AMAZING® Stories. I'm about one-third done, but I had to put it way. I won't be able to touch it until this time next year. I would also like to do some stand-alone books."

Salvatore's spare time is filled with weight-lifting, coaching hockey, playing basketball, and working with solid-fuel rocketry. "I also play softball. I love softball. I just have an incredibly normal life."

He plays the AD&D® game once a week. Most of the time he is the DM™. "They're not serious sessions," he explained, adding they're filled with a lot of conversation, pizza, and friends.

The only character from one of his novels that was played in a gaming session was Oliver deBurrows. "I created the character in my mind, then I ran him in the game. His taunts in the book are inspired by the game." He added he has also used AD&D game battles to help him choreograph fight scenes in his books. ❑

About the Cover

Artist Terry Pavlet rendered this illustration of Ravens Bluff's Lord Thief-Taker.

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Notes From HQ

Facelifts And Spring Cleaning

Ah, spring. The sounds of birds chirping. The hint of warmer weather (which is important to some people in Wisconsin). And, above all, the din of construction.

As I write this, I'm listening to the sounds of hammers, drills, and occasional loud thumps that shake the floor. Construction is going on next to the RPGA® Network offices. DRAGON® Magazine, DUNGEON® Adventures, and AMAZING® Stories are being moved upstairs, adjacent to us. Sigh. No longer will we have that old, empty warehouse space to stash boxes and boxes of envelopes and convention prizes. But, we gain the company of the wonderful editors of those magazines. It's a great tradeoff.

Besides, perhaps it's all for the better. It certainly is time for the Network to discard its Oscar Madison decor. No more boxes of stuff sitting around.

So, what does all of this have to do with a "Notes" column? Over the past several weeks we did an inventory of all the Network materials that have been accumulating through the years.

We have early back issues of the POLYHEDRON® Newszine to put up for contest prizes.

We have a few Network brass belt buckles that date back about 10 years (and which also will find their way into our contest prize bin).

And we have the energy to give the Network a bit of a facelift.

We're starting with new membership kits that will abolish the stickers and certificate. Instead, we will provide a nicer membership card and a "welcome to the Network" package that explains all the things available to members. We think it will make it easier for new people to get involved.

It will take a few months for all of this to be produced. And we'll keep you posted on how you can get a new card (for the cost of a stamp). We're also planning cards keyed to levels—Masters, Grand Masters, and Paragon.

Cosmetics aside, we need to know what you want out of the Network. What are we doing that you like? What do you consider unnecessary? And what you would like to see us offer? We want to change and grow based on our members' needs.

Take the time to jot us a letter, and we'll consider your input. Look for example at this month's featured article on R.A. Salvatore. It's here because members requested it.

Sidekick Contest

This month's contest is to create a sidekick or henchman for an AD&D® game player character. This can be a PC's henchman, follower, hireling.

Simple concept, right?

Think again.

A good sidekick isn't just an NPC who totes the party's equipment or does all the dirty work. A sidekick should provide plenty of opportunities for role playing and be a useful cog in the machinery the DM uses to create challenging adventures.

The Rules: Your sidekick entry must be typed, double-spaced, and not exceed three pages. Present the statistics in the same format as *The New Rogues Gallery* entry in this issue. All entries must come with a Standard Disclosure Form. If you do not have a form, contact Char Snyder at Network HQ.

You can enter as many times as you'd like. Just make sure your name and membership number appear on all the pages of your entries.

The Deadline: July 30th.

Suggestions: A good sidekick doesn't always have to work for a PC. He or she might be a camp follower who tags along in spite of, not because of, a PC's wishes.

Avoid the "ringer" cliche: A ringer is an NPC who appears to be helpful but really is a villain in disguise who'll betray the party when the moment is right (or wrong, depending on your point of view). Unless you've really got a fresh angle on this old trick, don't submit any ringers.

The Prizes: The top three entries will net their authors copies of POLYHEDRON Newszine #1. As always, we reserve the right to award additional prizes as we desire.

Newszine Submissions

Thinking about writing an article for the POLYHEDRON Newszine? Great! But don't think about it. Do it. I can't remember how many times people have said they had an article plotted out, but they just couldn't find the time.

The Newszine accepts unsolicited submissions. All we require is a Standard Disclosure Form.

We currently have a backlog of Living City submissions. However, we have few with low-level or 0-level proprietors. We welcome submissions dealing with various aspects of the AD&D® game, as our readers tend to prefer AD&D game material. However, we also print submissions dealing with other systems. Look at this issue's featured adventure.

Wondering if your topic will pique the editors' interests? Send us a postcard or brief letter stating what you want to write about. We'll tell you if its a good idea, if it doesn't fit the focus of the magazine right now, or if we already have several submissions on the same topic. Asking in advance could save you a lot of time.

Thanks

Sometimes members go above and behind the call of duty. One such individual who comes to mind is Regional Director Willi Burger.

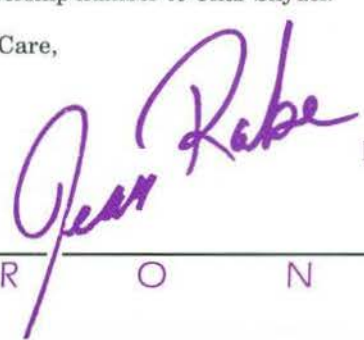
Willi will be assisting Network HQ in typing in points for east coast tournaments. This is a big undertaking, and it will mean tournament results will be recorded quicker because the work is spread out a little more.

This does not mean that if you live on the east coast you can pester Willi about your points. Pestering Willi is a very big no-no. Besides, Willi will not be able to tell you how many points you have. Willi's information will be sent to Network HQ to be compiled with all the other tournament records. This will produce a point total.

Network HQ does not accept point inquiries over the phone. To receive a printout of your tournament history, complete with point records, send a check or money order for two dollars and your membership number to Char Snyder.

Take Care,

Jean



Letters

An Open Missive To The Members

I'm Keith Polster, and since 1988 I have been the role playing coordinator for East Hall at the GEN CON® Game Fair. When you decide to run a role playing game or tournament that isn't a Network event, I am the person who looks over your proposal. I consider what you would like to run, when you would like to run it, and if it suitable to play. In the past five years I turned away only three events because of ethics.

This year I'm also scheduling judges for Network events in the Arena. I will schedule judges first-come, first-served. So to have the best chance of judging the tournaments you would like, send in a form—NOW. A Network judge appeal for this GEN CON Game Fair is included with this issue. Jean told me Network tournaments could be scaled back if we do not have enough judges.

There's some changes in store this year at the Game Fair that will make it easier for you to play and judge Network and non-Network events at the convention. You might recall those long walks from East Hall to the Network events in the MECCA Arena, and how if you judged or played or coordinated Network and non-Network events your feet felt horrible at the end of the day. To all of you with the blistered soles I have good news—"East Hall" has moved! Geeze, it feels good to say that, and my feet are happy, too! Well, the hall didn't go anywhere, but all the non-Network events that were in it did.

Where did we move you ask? Why, right next door to the Arena in good old Bruce Hall. No more fighting the clock, the crowd, or your tired aching feet because we're only a hop, skip and a jump from all the many Network events.

We hope this will help everyone who has struggled these past five years like I have to try and be two places at once—and on time. We will have several stations set up as information booths, with radio contact to the main headquarters, located at the old Network HQ room next to the stage in Bruce Hall.

At this point you might be saying "Hey, I don't know if I'm a good enough game master to run my own event or judge a Network tournament." Well, I remember a long time ago when I asked myself that same question. To all of you I say, you won't know unless you try—and inevitably you have to give it a shot. Why not choose the largest and greatest convention of all time to get the ball rolling. The first thing you have to do is decide what you would like to run or judge, then contact the GEN CON® Game Fair Department or the RPGA® Network at TSR and ask for a judge's form to register your event.

If you're a judge who comes to the Game Fair only to play, please consider running three slots of a Network or non-Network event. It won't take too much time out of your schedule, and it will help ensure that we have enough judges for the convention.

If you are accepted as a Network judge (and we rarely turn anyone away), you will be mailed a schedule of your games this spring. You will receive copies of the scenario at least a month before the Game Fair.

If you're non-Network event is accepted for Bruce Hall, you'll be notified as quickly as possible. Make sure that you show up on time—and please be prepared. When a judge fails to show up or is unprepared, it not only hurts your image, but it hurts the players who set aside precious convention time to play in your event. Judges who were scheduled for events last year, and who failed to show, will not be scheduled to run for the next few years.

If you have a question about judging, don't be afraid to ask. That's what I'm here for.

As for those of you who play, don't be afraid to ask me or any of my convention staff a question. We'll help you find your event or get you into another one in the event of a no-show judge. Give your scheduled judge a chance, however. If he or she isn't there precisely at the start of the slot, give him or her a few minutes. Maybe your judge just finished an event elsewhere.

In closing, I would like to say THANKS to the judges who come back year after year to run Network and non-Network tournaments—you help make the convention one of the best gaming events in the world. And to those people who plan on making this GEN CON Game Fair their first judging experience, THANKS, also. We need the participation of hundreds of judges.

Keith Polster
West Bend, WI

P.S. I have inside news on some of the Network tournaments scheduled for this Game Fair (don't tell Jean about this). If you are looking for great games to judge or play, may I suggest the AD&D Masters, AD&D Rats, and the BOOT HILL® game tournaments. ❑

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Take A Byte

Barovia Invades Computer Gaming

by Erlene Mooney

S.S.I. has begun work on a computer role playing game for the RAVENLOFT® setting.

Dave Lucca, associate producer of the project, said S.S.I. plans to release the game this fall. However, he added, there is a lot of work to be done—including establishing a plot.

The game will have a new engine and startling high-resolution graphics, Lucca said. In technical terms, most games have 320 pixels, or colored dots across the screen, that form the pictures. When you "zoom in" on an aspect of the scene depicted, you can see the blocks of color and you lose detail, he said.

However, in the high-resolution screen for the RAVENLOFT setting game, there will be so many more pixels that the pictures will look smooth—even close up.

"When you go up to a wall, you'll see the bricks and mortar, not blocks of color," Lucca said. It takes more memory to use high-resolution graphics, but the end product is worth it, he emphasized.

The improved graphics will let the artists show more on the screen and display more detail. In effect, even though the screen is the same size, the game's playing field is larger because the images are tighter and more can be shown, he explained.

"We wanted a prettier game, more pleasing to look at. It's what everyone will be striving for."

The game will have four characters of 6th to 8th level. Lucca said players cannot bring in characters from other AD&D® computer games. However, he said characters that start in this game can be carried over into other RAVENLOFT computer games.

Lucca said the RAVENLOFT game will have auto-mapping, similar to features in the S.S.I. games "Veil of Darkness" and "The Summoning." Auto-mapping means that the player can print out a copy of the map showing where his or her characters have been, he said. It is handy for reference and backtracking.

"We also want to see if we can do note-taking." Lucca said ideally that would mean the player can type on his or her computer keyboard and have notes appear on the map that is printed out. The maps will print in black and white on dot matrix or laser printers.

The RAVENLOFT computer game is intended for IBM 386 or higher computers and IBM compatibles with at least VGA monitors, he said. It will require a mouse and a hard drive, and will not be as great a memory hog as the DARK SUN™ setting computer game.

Although at the time this article was written the plot had not been established, Lucca said there are some elements that are locked-in.

"Strahd is going to be in it, and it's going to be set in Barovia," he said. "Strahd will be our main nemesis."

One of the game's main features will be the music. "The RAVENLOFT setting is TSR's gothic horror role playing game, and music sets the atmosphere and tone in gothic horror, like in vampire movies. We want to capture that same mood-grabbing atmosphere."

Lucca said "Eye of The Beholder III" has six musical scores, each three to four minutes long. The RAVENLOFT computer game will surpass that. He said combining the music and high-resolution graphics will produce "great cinematics," animated scenes that fill the screen.

This will be S.S.I.'s second horror game, with "Veil of Darkness," being the first. Lucca believes horror games will do well in the computer market, even though they are fairly new to it. Some of the existing horror computer games include Accolade's "Elvira," "Elvira II," and "Waxworks." However, he said he views those games more as "displays of graphic violence" than horror.

"With the RAVENLOFT game we want to scare you more than make you sick." Lucca likened it to movies, explaining he would put the RAVENLOFT computer game in a class such as "The Shining," rather than "Friday The 13th."

Lucca considers himself a horror buff, which is one reason he welcomed the assignment of the RAVENLOFT computer game. In addition, he regularly plays in the AD&D® game RAVENLOFT setting.

"The RAVENLOFT setting is one of my favorite TSR worlds. I play the AD&D game a lot, and I just finished up a game set in Ravenloft," Lucca said, adding he is usually the DM™.

Lucca believes the computer version of the RAVENLOFT game will appeal to people aged 14-25. Players do not need to be familiar with the setting or even play the AD&D game, he said.

"It's a stand-alone game. You plug it in, turn it on, and get right into it." However, he said it could especially appeal to AD&D game players because the RAVENLOFT computer game closely follows the AD&D game rules. "You can see the world, rather than just visualize it. Plus, you can play it yourself. You don't have to have other players."

Lucca said there will be at least two programmers, two to four artists, a musician, and "a slew of playtesters," involved in the game. And, there will be more computer games in the RAVENLOFT setting series, he added. How many more is a question left in the mists. ❑

The Living City

The Lord Thief-Taker

by David "Zeb" Cook

Lost on three evenings last, out of a counting house in Eelskin Court, a Ledger of the Day's Transactions. It is of account to none but the Owner, being posted to the Settlement Book already that day. Whoever will bring the same Ledger to Anton Paere above Burnt-Gate Inn shall have a reward and no questions asked.

Not a week, nor even a day, passes without an advertisement much like this one appearing among the Regent's notices. Thus Anton Paere and his Office of Lost Property serves the good and honest citizens of Ravens Bluff. Anton Paere is a thief-taker—indeed *the* thief-taker of Ravens Bluff. While not respectable, the notorious Master Paere provides a necessary service by recovering stolen property.

To the thieves and swindlers of the underworld, Anton Paere is one of them. In fact, more than just "one of them." He is perhaps the greatest guildmaster in the city. His rule of cunning and fear extends to nearly every scoundrel in Ravens Bluff. His many contacts guarantee that there is very little stolen property he does not know about and few thieves he cannot lay his hands on. This knowledge combined with his unique talents of organization have made Paere the unsurpassed master of all thieves.

Anton Paere

12th Level Male Human Thief

STR: 14
INT: 17
WIS: 12
DEX: 17
CON: 15
CHA: 15

AC Normal: −1
AC Rear: 2
Hit Points: 49
Alignment: Lawful Evil
Languages: Common, Thieves' Cant
Age: 39
Height: 5′ 5″
Weight: 165 lbs.
Hair/Eyes: Ash/Gray

Weapon Proficiencies: rapier, crossbow, dagger, hand crossbow, staff
Nonweapon Proficiencies: Appraising (17), forgery (16), gaming (15), gem-cutting (15), read/write Common (18)

Thief Abilities:

PP	OL	FT	MS	HS	DN	CW	RL
85	75	50	80	85	35	85	75

Magic Items: *Rapier +3, dagger +2, ring of protection +5, ring of human influence, amulet of proof against detection and location, cloak of protection +3* (The Lord Thief-taker has access to many other magical items, from scrolls to exotic miscellany. This includes a formidable selection of rods and weaponry. However, Anton Paere prefers to go about only lightly-armed, since this reinforces his claim that he is an honest citizen).

Anton Paere hardly fits most people's image of a master criminal. He is of average height, with a stocky, muscular build. His face is broad, and his body is heavy with age and strong drink. His eyes are watery but filled with intelligence. He keeps his most notable features covered beneath his gowns and stylish head cloth, for his body sports nearly two dozen scars from knifings, swordfights, and magical burns.

Hidden by the sleeping cap he almost always wears are two silver plates fitted into his skull, the work of a surgeon repairing some secret injury. The story goes that a bowman of the rattling lay—a thief who specializes in stealing from coaches—having spoke to some purpose (stolen something), disputed the payback (the price offered) and laid Anton's brains open when there was no way to get a proper healing. Rescued by his confederates and taken to a barber's, the man patched the thief-taker's skull with household plate. Upon his recovery, Anton hobbled (arrested) his attacker and arranged false evidences (witnesses) so that the thief was scragg'd (hanged). Of course, this is only a story.

On the street, Anton is easily identified by his head cloth and silver baton. The latter he carries as a personal signet of his authority over his fellow criminals. He typically carries a diamond-hilted rapier at his side but wears no armor. Nonetheless, those who have had cause to test him can attest to the proof of the magical protections he carries, for their attacks have met with little success. When in his lair, he wears a velveteen dressing gown and slippers—even when meeting with the quality (upper class) who have come to try his service. In general, Master Paere does his best to seem no more than a capable and upright citizen.

In his efforts, Master Paere is assisted by two able confederates, Kedrick "The Grinder," and Naravil Hoskin. These two do most of the actual work required of Anton Paere, watching the gangs, gathering rumors, tracking down prigs (thieves), and gathering up the conies or culls (victims). Both Kedrick (a dwarf) and Naravil (a halfling) are quick-witted and bold. Further, they are fiercely loyal to the Lord Thief-Taker. This is partly due to fear, for they know Paere's revenge would be certain if they crossed him, and partly from trust, for both believe Paere will protect them from the authorities so long as they remain in his employ. Finally, both are confident that they could never be paid so well while working for anyone else. Their trust in Paere is justified only to a point; the thief-taker would unflinchingly betray them to the authorities should he deem it necessary.

The System

Anton Paere is a man of two faces, at least. For the general population, he is polite, efficient, even concerned—a man who serves the public at little or no profit by recovering stolen property and catching thieves. So successful is he at the latter that he is more feared by the underworld than any of the various constables, watches, and guards who supposedly protect the city.

Anton's business divides into three main parts: the Office of Lost Property, the rewards of thief-taking, and the control of his gangs. The first two are public and legal—at least in theory. The third portion of his business is not widely known to those outside the spheres of crime.

On the public side, the Office of Lost Property seems simple. Through his network of informers, Anton Paere

claims he can locate nearly any piece of stolen property within the city walls. Once an item is found, he arranges for the owner to buy back his stolen property from the thief—all at a reduced price that Anton has arranged. In practice the procedure generally goes like this:

First the thief-taker finds his cull (victim). Sometimes he hears of a theft and just sends a note to the victim. At other times, the victim, knowing of Anton's skills, comes to him. Most often, the thief-taker first arranges the theft and then contacts the victim.

Whatever the cause, when the two finally meet, Paere takes one gold piece ("for services to be rendered") and hears all the particulars of the case—what was stolen, when, and where. Usually, Master Paere already knows these facts, indeed he may already have the stolen item kept safely in one of his lockups. Nonetheless, he listens attentively and advises the victim to hire criers or post bills (like the one at the beginning of this article) to seek the return of the lost goods. Armed with this advice, the cull is sent off to stew for a few days. Meanwhile, Paere uses the time to track down the property and negotiate with the current owner.

When the cull does return, Anton has encouraging words to say. He has heard news that the property in question might be regained. He suggests an amount "acceptable" to those who have stolen it and broadly hints at a meeting place. Anton is cunning enough not to be caught taking the payment himself—since this would make him an accessory to the crime. Instead, he tells the cull to expect a porter or messenger from the thieves. Once the messenger is paid the correct amount, the item is returned, often suddenly and unexpectedly.

With the goods so efficiently (and cheaply) recovered, it is not unusual for the grateful cull to offer a reward to the efficient and resourceful thief-taker. Of course, the business earns more than just a gold piece and occasional reward. Most of the money paid to regain stolen goods goes straight into Anton's pocket. It is his cut, taken directly from the thieves.

The Bounty

Not all thieves are so cooperative or all culls so forgiving, and that leads to Anton's second "official" duty—hunting down and arresting thieves. This is, of course, the responsibility of the various guards of the city, but they are seriously divided. The Guild Regent's Marshals claim jurisdiction over each guildhall; the Exchequer's Constables claim precedence in all cases of counterfeiting, clipping, and false coining, along with tax evasion. They often find themselves at odds with the Harbormaster's Guard, who claim authority over all activity on the Waterfront. (This claim also puts them at odds with the Guild Marshals, particularly when dealing with smugglers who might also happen to be members of the Merchant's Guild. Of course, smugglers would also attract the attention of the Exchequer, and so around it goes.)

Add to these the Chancellor's high sheriffs (who prosecute violations by the feudal lords or their men), the Ecclesiastical Courts (headed by the Chief Prelate to prevent treasonous heresy against the welfare of the city), and the various guards of the original feudal lords, and the situation quickly becomes impossible. It is little wonder that the Lord Marshal's Constables find their authority constrained on all sides. Technically the Constables have responsibility over all the city, but the Watch (as it is also known) find their authority thwarted in many areas.

The Harbormaster's Guard insists the constables have no jurisdiction over the port. By ancient tradition, only Protectors of the Prelate can enter and make arrests in sanctified ground (which also includes city blocks owned by the various temples). Likewise, the property of the independent lords is beyond the reach of the constables. The Exchequer's Constables are the only ones who can enter the counting houses of the city, while the Guild Marshals apply the same right to the guildhalls. Thus, whole sections of Ravens Bluff are off-limits to the City Watch, a fact hardly lost on the city's thieves.

To deal with this impossible law-enforcement, the Council of Lords pays a bounty of 20 pieces of gold for every thief captured and brought to trial. They had hoped this would decimate the ranks of the criminals. Instead, they created a new profession—thief-taker.

Thief-Taking

To the majority of honest citizens, Anton's courageous efforts to quell rampant thievery is commendable and valorous. Accompanied by his aides, Anton uses his knowledge and contacts to bring thieves, notorious or not, to justice. Using a collection of dubious general warrants (obtained through bribes and wheedling) to justify his arrests, Paere seizes thieves and sends them to the city gaols—Ill-Water, Nevin Street, or Golden Ball. There they languish until brought before the city courts. Since the Chancery Courts are convened only 10 days out of every 28 (at most), prisoners often wait weeks before their case is heard.

At trial before the Chancery Court, Evidences (witnesses) swear testimony against the accused or can be brought in to speak for him. The Evidences may only be questioned by the judges. The accused's lawyer (if he has one) is not allowed to ask any questions of Evidences or point out their lies (this is up to the judges). A lawyer's only purpose is to raise or challenge points of law—whether the charge is correct to the crime, the indictment properly presented, etc. Sometimes this results in amazing legalistic tricks to free the obviously guilty. Once the testimony is heard, the judges rule on the case. Should they believe the Evidences are sound and all is done according to the law, the accused is sentenced (usually to servitude, sometimes to death).

Of course, clerics and mages could (and often are) used by the court to sort honesty from falsehood, but in simple cases truth or lies are usually less important than swift justice by example. It is assumed that Evidences tell the truth and only those obviously conflicting or wrong-headed are doubted. Furthermore, Evidences against the accused are assumed to be more honest. After all, the defendant is already an arrested thief, so those who would speak for him are suspect themselves. In the end, the deck is stacked against the accused, as every person in the city knows. Ultimately it is more important that someone be punished for a crime so long as it is most often the right person. Once the conviction is made, Anton collects his bounty and all is well.

Even with this rigged system, Anton Paere would be an upstanding man if he honestly tried to bring criminals before the bar. That is hardly the case, though. Anton is an evil and cunning man. He uses the system to make and break the thief gangs of the city. If a gang refuses to deal with him, Paere arrests the members and frames them for crimes, hiring false Evidences to swear against them. Under this threat, more than a

few of the thieves he arrests turn on their old companions until they all wind up testifying against each other, hoping to win Paere's or the court's favor.

To this end, Anton Paere keeps in his employ Verrics of Langfor, a half-elven mage and professional Evidence of sorts. Verrics arranges for false witnesses, coaches them in their stories, even assumes the stand herself in one disguise after another. She is very good, very convincing, and her words have sent many people to the quarries for crimes they did not commit, although, if not guilty of one crime, they are more than certainly guilty of another. After all, Anton is dealing with thieves, not innocent citizens.)

Also in Paere's employ is Rismon Halakew, a lawyer before the Chancery Court. Rismon's task is to protect those thieves loyal (and useful) to the Lord Thief-Taker should they be arrested. Halakew is a master at legal loopholes, double-jeopardy, and twisting indictments. He and Verrics often work together, one questioning the validity of the charge while the other provides a useful alibi. Ideally they also find a dupe to frame for the crime.

Given the power Anton wields through the courts, it is no surprise that few thieves who want to have any career in Ravens Bluff question his authority. Indeed, in their circles he is often hailed, in hushed tones, as the Regulator.

The Business of Regulation

Beyond the public eye is Anton Paere's main occupation, running the thief gangs of the city. From his rooms, Anton regulates the activities of nearly every thief in Ravens Bluff. To each gang he assigns a portion of the city as their turf; for every thief, he knows at what lays (thieving methods) they excel. For the festivals and fairs, he assembles teams of pickpockets and cut-purses. Outside of the city he posts highwaymen. To the counting houses he sends embezzlers and coin-shavers.

For the thieves, Anton's rule has several benefits. First, ugly turf wars are avoided. If one gang poaches on another, the Regulator arrests a few as a warning to the others. Second, Anton protects those useful to him—usually. The thief-taker is without morals and has no qualms about sending over a loyal thief should he suddenly need the money. Still, it is better than most thieves could expect otherwise.

Finally, Anton's Lost Property Office pays for the return of stolen goods. The thief-taker normally allows his thieves to keep half of what the client pays for the returned goods, claiming the other half for himself and his accomplices. While a thief might get more at a fence, there is also the chance he (and the fence) would be arrested by Anton or another. Anton does not offer the most money, but it is better than no money at all.

Through rewards and fear, then, Anton knows virtually every thief and every theft in the city. A thief steals a purse and sends word to the thief-taker who then arranges for its return. Thus, both thief and thief-taker are paid by the client. So great is his power that Anton frequently sends word of what should be stolen and who should steal it. Thus, Anton Paere becomes both cause and cure of the city's ills. Indeed, so great is Anton's business that he maintains several secret warehouses (known as "lockups") where stolen goods are kept. He also owns a small sloop, the Crester, captained by the corsair Samantha Sharks-Blood, to smuggle out goods too hot or valuable to be simply returned. Samantha unloads these items in other ports of the Sea of Fallen Stars.

Of course, the thief-taker is careful. First and foremost, all his properties are permanently screened from scrying and detection. The most valuable of goods are held in extra-dimensional lockups that only Anton can open. He rarely takes stolen goods directly, so as to avoid the crime of receiving stolen property. Either one of his men handles the transaction, or the client pays the thief directly (with Anton taking his cut after the fact). And lastly, the thief-taker works to maintain the image of an upstanding man. He seizes on the chance to arrest those who have committed shocking crimes (murder, for example), knowing this will give him public acclaim. And he has no qualms about bringing down a thief or gang that has become too notorious. He tries to avoid framing the out-right innocent and often refuses rewards from the wealthy and powerful.

The Properties

An operation as large and complicated as Anton's cannot function out of a tavern cellar or a set of rented rooms, like the gangs the thief-taker grips in his control. No, Anton's business requires substantial property, from modest salons to arcanely hidden and protected warehouses.

Ever the cautious man, though, Paere goes to great pains to conceal just what properties he owns. Except for his own apartments, over a tavern just off Weavers Green, no other properties bear his name. Some—those that are rented—are in the names of his deputies. Anton provides the rent money, but his agents sign the papers.

For those properties he must own (most notably his hidden lockups), Anton buries his role behind false names, unrecorded land transfers, and out-of-towners. (This is a legalistic trick to save Paere from the risks of holding stolen goods.) The thief-taker cannot be blamed for crimes that occur on another's property, after all.

Paere's two main haunts are his apartments off Weavers Green and The Swan and Siren on Fishmongers Court in Crow's End. The house on Weavers Green is a three-story building and is Anton's self-styled Office of Lost Property. Here he meets honest citizens seeking to regain their goods. The neighborhood is quiet, and, since Anton discourages thieves from hanging around the area, relatively crime-free.

The Chancellor's Arm, a tavern, takes up the ground floor. The innkeeper, Agostin of Therunt (better known as Agostin Sour-Beer behind his back), rents from Paere at a rate more than reasonable. This and a steady stream of customers ensures the old innkeeper's loyalty. Agostin doesn't pry into his landlord's affairs. The old man doesn't know the thief-taker is a criminal, but he does know Anton is a powerful man in a dangerous trade.

While Anton spends some evenings dining and drinking in the Chancellor's Arm, he is just as likely to be found at The Swan and Siren. Again, Anton owns the property, although it is managed by Gabriun "Beer-Gut," a dwarf. In one of the back stalls, Paere meets with a steady stream of thieves and informers. He is usually accompanied by Kedrick and several strong-arm men (including out-of-work adventurers) who prevent any trouble.

Not far from the waterfront is the largest of three lockups the thief-taker maintains. Here, he keeps goods such as bales of cloth, stacks of fine lumber, casks of wine, and the like that have been stolen from the ships, warehouses,

and caravans that crowd the district. Most of these goods are destined to be smuggled out to other ports, accompanied by treasures too obvious or valuable to just return.

The second lockup is cleverly located in an old temple ward. Although the temple (Gond's) has long since moved, the ward is still outside the jurisdiction of the city watch. Only officials of the Ecclesiastical Courts have permission to make arrests here, a power they seldom exercise.

Needless to say, the entire ward is a haven to thieves and outlaws of all types. From the outside the lock is a normal warehouse. Inside, a permanent *programmed illusion* creates a veil of emptiness and decay. Illusionary rats scuttle over dust-covered and rotting heaps of junk, while illusionary walls cleverly close off parts of the building, hiding spaces within spaces. Magical glyphs further work to discourage foolish thieves not already deterred by Anton's reputation.

The third lockup does not exist in Ravens Bluff, although Anton carries it with him wherever he goes. It is a cell beneath the surface of Toril's moon, sealed to the outside world. The thief-taker's silver baton is the key; when struck three times and the command word is spoken, the bearer is instantly transported there (or back). Anton uses this lockup for his most precious goods, the ones that would tempt every thief were such items left in the city.

There is no doubt Anton Paere owns more properties than these, but the others are little used in his illicit businesses. His holdings include residences, a small dry dock, shops, and taverns—all further sources of income for the Lord Thief-Taker.

The PCs and Anton

The PCs can meet Anton Paere in several ways. First, and most likely, they might do business with his Office of Lost Property, should they fall victim to one of the city's thieves. The thief-taker's service is so well-known that at least one solicitous NPC will steer them in Paere's direction. The NPC might be a well-meaning soul, but could just as likely be one of Paere's stooges. At any rate, the characters get to see just what a devoted public servant Paere is. He will recover the goods (unless it's something really valuable) by the methods already described. Of course, the return will cost the player characters—though not excessively.

It is unlikely that Paere will have any other business with the PCs—unless, of course, they decide to nose into his business. Anton doesn't like people who ask questions. Those who ask too many disappear—suddenly. The Grinder and Naravil do the dirty work. When performing such tasks, the pair are specially equipped with necessary magical items from Paere's supply of stolen goods. Bodies are disposed somewhere in Crow's End. In that quarter, several more unsolved deaths won't raise too much concern—especially if the victims are adventurers or other sorts of shiftless folks.

Thieves are likely to meet Anton under entirely different circumstances, and this may introduce PCs to the other side of Anton's "system." If anything worthwhile is stolen, Naravil will hunt out the group's trail, and once he has found it, the party will get a visit from Kedrick and Hoskin. The pair make their pitch to buy back the item—and, if the group looks competent and cooperative, holds out the offer of more work. They won't mention Anton's name during the first several meetings, not until they are sure of the PCs. However, once the characters are part of the system, they will find it hard to get out. Paere finds that turncoats, rebels, and slackers make excellent scapegoats for other people's crimes.

Of course, the PCs might be too good, too notorious, or too troublesome for Paere. The easiest solution is to get rid of the problem, and so the PCs might find themselves arrested and framed for crimes they did not commit. Evidences, led by Verrics of Langfor, will give a convincing account of the PCs' crimes, and the judges are not likely to dig much further. If necessary, Anton can dig into his own pockets to bribe any counsel the PCs hire or even bribe the judges themselves. The PCs will have to be clever to get off the hook. Certainly they should sweat about their fate.

Finally, there is a slim chance that non-thief PCs will attract Anton's favorable notice. He sometimes hires guards and muscle for his enterprise, although he hires outsiders with great reluctance. Anton is a thief, and so assumes that everyone is likely to betray his operation. This seems extremely paranoid to honest folk, but in Anton's circles it is certainly justified. The Thief-Taker has betrayed more than his share of old companions and expects no less of them. Therefore, any PCs he employs will be given as little information as possible. Most likely, Kedrick or one of the others will simply hire them under false pretenses. The less the PCs know, the better. It is entirely possible for the PCs to have done several jobs for the thief-taker without realizing so.

A Historical Note

For those who protest that such a creature as Anton Paere is too unrealistic to exist, he, the business of thief-taking, and the Office of Lost Property are not wholly fictitious creations. They are based on the career of Jonathan Wilde. In the early part of the 18th century, Wilde, who styled himself "thief-taker general," organized and ruled over many of the thieves in London, using the techniques described here. One of the first great racketeers, Wilde's plots and schemes eventually caught up with him, and he was hanged on the same gallows where he had sent so many others.

Kedrick "The Grinder"

10th Level Male Dwarf Fighter

STR: 17
INT: 11
WIS: 14
DEX: 16
CON: 13
CHA: 10

AC Normal: −6
AC Rear: −3
Hit Points: 50
Alignment: Lawful Evil
Languages: Common, Dwarf, Zhentarim, Procampese
Age: 131
Height: 4′ 2″
Weight: 220 lbs.
Hair/Eyes: Black/Brown

Weapon Proficiencies: Long sword (specialized), dagger, short bow, club, battle axe, spear
Nonweapon Proficiencies: Armorer (9), gaming (10), weaponsmithing (8)
Magic Items: *Long sword +4, field plate +4, ring of protection +1, dust of appearance, potions of levitation and polymorph self, girdle of many pouches*

Kedrick is a squat, muscular dwarf, scarred by fire and battle. His job is to collect money from reluctant thieves, breaking heads when necessary. While not brilliant, he's no idiot and has bet-

ter sense than to cross Paere, knowing full well what intensity the thief-taker's revenge would be. Besides, he has profited from Paere's racket and has hopes of taking over when his employer eventually tumbles.

Naravil Hoskin

8th Level Male Halfling Thief

STR: 10
INT: 14
WIS: 12
DEX: 15
CON: 12
CHA: 15

AC Normal: 8
AC Rear: 8
Hit Points: 28
Alignment: Lawful Evil
Languages: Common, Halfling, Gnome, Elf
Age: 47
Height: 3′ 4″
Weight: 68 lbs.
Hair/Eyes: Brown/Hazel

Weapon Proficiencies: Short sword, dagger, hand crossbow, dart
Nonweapon Proficiencies: Rope use (15), disguise (14), gaming (15), reading lips (12)

PP	OL	FT	MS	HS	DN	CW	RL
85	60	25	65	85	20	45	0

Magic Items: *Short sword +2, darts +3* (x5), *brooch of shielding, ring of protection +2, potion of clairvoyance, potion of speed, bag of beans, boots of levitation, hat of disguise*

Naravil, a muscular halfling of seemingly endless cheerfulness, is Paere's underworld watchman. With his thieving abilities, charm, and magical items, Naravil moves through the thief community, even gaining entry in houses where Paere's name is despised. Naravil seldom acts directly, meeting all defiance and insult with the same bland smile. His revenge will come later, in a dark alley with a sharp knife.

Verrics of Langfor

9th Level Female Half Elf Mage

STR: 11
INT: 16
WIS: 13
DEX: 17
CON: 10
CHA: 16

AC Normal: −1
AC Rear: 2
Hit Points: 23
Alignment: Lawful Evil
Languages: Common, Elvish
Age: 27
Height: 5′ 10″
Weight: 160 lbs.
Hair/Eyes: Brown/Green

Weapon Proficiencies: Dagger, staff
Nonweapon Proficiencies: Artistic ability (painting) (13), disguise (15), read/write Common (17), spellcraft (14)

Magic Items: *Dagger +1, potion of polymorph self, scroll of protection from petrification, scroll of four spells (determine as needed), oil of fire elemental invulnerability, horn of fog*
Spells/day: 4 3 3 2 1

Spell Book:
Level One: *Read magic, change self, friends, hypnotism, phantasmal force;* Level Two: *Alter self, improved phantasmal force, irritation, whispering wind;* Level Three: *Delude, non-detection;* Level Four: *Emotion, improved invisibility, polymorph other;* Level Five: *Major creation*

Verrics is a sharp-nosed woman of considerable persuasive ability. So steeped is she in treachery and betrayal that she no longer distinguishes truth from falsehood in even the slightest dealings.

Rismon Halakew

0-Level Male Human

STR: 12
INT: 14
WIS: 14
DEX: 10
CON: 3
CHA: 12

AC Normal: 10
AC Rear: 10
Hit Points: 4
Alignment: Lawful Neutral
Languages: Common
Age: 63
Height: 5′ 4″
Weight: 100 lbs
Hair/Eyes: Gray (what remains of it)/ Green

Weapon Proficiencies: None
Nonweapon Proficiencies: Etiquette (12), law (17), read/write Common
Magic Items: none

A stoop-backed ancient, Rismon gives the impression of being barely alive. His bony chest heaves with a consumptive cough that has defied all clerical cures. It makes every word he speaks, every question he asks seem like his last. His dried and wrinkled skin is pulled tight against his skull till his features have the look of some maniacally attentive vulture, bright eyes gleaming eagerly from their deep sockets. Rismon has devoted his life to money and the law and as long as he is well-paid, few can outwit him in court.

Samantha Sharks-Blood

7th Level Female Human Fighter

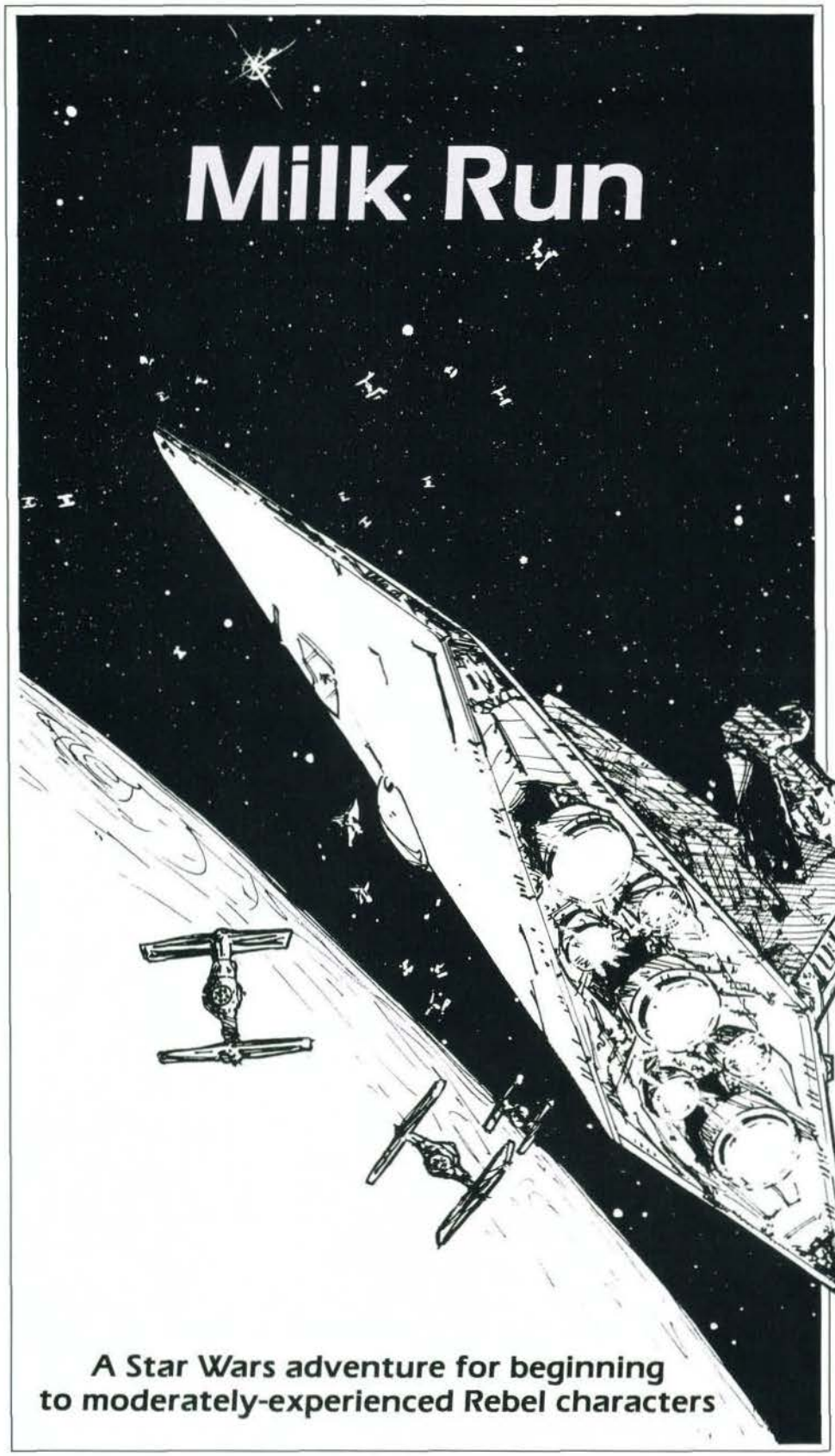
STR: 14
INT: 11
WIS: 15
DEX: 12
CON: 14
CHA: 13

AC Normal: −1
AC Rear: 2
Hit Points: 39
Alignment: Neutral Evil
Languages: Common, Melgaunt
Age: 23
Height: 5′ 9″
Weight: 140 lbs.
Hair/Eyes: Black/Black

Weapon Proficiencies: Trident (specialized), long sword, crossbow, dagger, lasso
Nonweapon Proficiencies: Seamanship (13), direction sense (16), swimming (14), weather sense (14), navigation (9)

Magic Items: *Trident +1, bolts +2* (×11), *chain mail +4, ring of mind shielding, oil of fiery burning, scroll of protection from possession*

The sunburnt and freckled Samantha is Anton's closest and most trusted companion—for what that loyalty is worth among this ring of cut-throats and swindlers. The thief-taker has provided Samantha with ship, crew, and profitable cargos, and she somewhat naively believes these tools of his work are sureties against betrayal. (In truth, Anton would giver her up without hesitation should the need arise.) She is not the greatest sailor of the Sea of Fallen Stars by any means, but she knows every bay and cove from Calaunt to the shores of Thay, invaluable knowledge for a smuggler.



by Sterling Hershey

Several ships float silently in space, tugging away at an asteroid with tractor beams. In less than an hour they have repositioned the massive rock in the middle of a busy spacelane. Hours pass, and ships begin to appear from hyperspace, each performing maneuvers to avoid the asteroid. Some fail and collide with it, exploding in spectacular bursts of fire and light. The ships that survive are soon boarded by the waiting craft, which proceed to remove their captives' valuable cargoes.

Fade to a Rebel Briefing Room on the planet of Tancon.

Players' Introduction

You sit straight and attentive while your Rebel Commander details your next mission.

"I'm sorry to assign you to another mission when you are due for some R&R," the commander intones as he paces back and forth across the room. "However, Support has requested a supply run to the Karinda Outpost. The run is yours. The trip shouldn't be too risky, and I don't anticipate any fights. You have been assigned the stock light freighter *Arion Star,* a recent acquisition. The ship has not been associated with Rebel activity—yet. I hope you keep it that way.

"You must first pick up the supplies on an Imperial planet. That shouldn't cause you concern, as we have prepared a cover. You are to pose as employees of NavStar Transport, a Rebel front company. You are to take the NavStar freighter to Da'Harin Spaceport on Greyman's Planet in the Soarin System. There you will meet with Roger Stern of Stern Traders. He is a Rebel sympathizer and will provide the supplies you are to pick up. Support did not give me a list or invoice, so you must meet with him to obtain the goods. After making the pick up, you are to deliver the supplies to the site of the unfinished Karinda Outpost in the Karinda System.

"All required coordinates are in the ship's navigational computer, and some additional equipment is also on board. It is very important you meet

with Stern on time. If you are late, he may suspect Imperial trouble and leave.

"You must get underway immediately. Good luck, and may the Force be with you."

Fade to the player characters launching the Arion Star.

Game Master Background

This adventure takes place between *Star Wars: A New Hope* and *The Empire Strikes Back*. The Death Star was recently destroyed, and the Imperials have intensified their search for Rebels and their sympathizers.

The following books will be helpful, but not required, in running this adventure: *Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game, The Imperial Sourcebook, The Rebel Sourcebook, Cracken's Rebel Field Guide,* and *The Rules Companion.*

The Arion Star

There is nothing special about the ship's appearance. Any PC checking for problems should make a moderate Starship Repair roll (15). If anything is found, it should be minor, such as a light doesn't work in the cargo bay or the engine repair hatch sticks, but can still be opened. It is a normal stock light freighter. Minor annoyances should be discovered or occur as dramatically needed. No major systems should fail, except as noted during the adventure.

However, if the PCs state they are checking the guidance system, have them make a difficult Starship Repair roll (20). If the check fails, the PCs notice nothing. If successful, the PCs discover that the guidance system control board will likely short out in the near future. This is a plot device for the final episode. Let the PCs attempt to repair the system (while landed, not while in motion). If they succeed, fine. Even if they have a technician fix it on Greyman's Planet, the repair will only last until the final episode. Should they fail, inform them that the board will probably remain functional long enough to reach the outpost for repairs.

An easy Search roll (5) or Perception check will reveal the following items on board:

- Four fastflesh medpacs, see *Cracken's Rebel Field Guide,* page 15.
- Six regular medpacs
- Starship repair kit—various tools
- Ship registration, ship weapon and shield permits, landing permits for Greyman's planet—all authentic and all on datapads.
- Three comlinks
- A pair of macrobinoculars

Standard duration for the hyperspace trip to Greyman's planet is two days. The PCs are to meet Stern in two days, therefore it is important they do not waste a lot of time.

Arion Star—Stock Light Freighter
Length: 30 meters
Crew: 2
Passengers: 6
Cargo: 100 metric tons
Consumables: 2 months
Hyperdrive Multiplier: ×1
Nav Computer: Yes
Hyperdrive Backup: Yes
Sublight Speed: 2D+2
Maneuverability: 1D
Hull: 4D
Shields: 2D
Weapons:
Two Laser Cannons
Fire Control: 2D
Damage: 4D

Episode One: The Trap

Suddenly, you feel the Arion Star drop out of hyperspace and collision alert sirens wail throughout the ship. Racing for the cockpit, you see a huge asteroid, which you are approaching at an incredible speed!

The pilot must make a moderate Starship Piloting roll (15) to avoid the asteroid. A combined roll with a copilot is allowed. Spending a Force point would be appropriate, though probably not necessary. If the pilot fails, the ship becomes heavily damaged when it scrapes its hull against an edge of the asteroid (should this happen, be very dramatic in your description). The PCs should roll against 2D damage from the collision.

As the asteroid ceases to fill the entire viewport, many points of light attract your attention. As you watch, you see a small craft being chased by a corvette. Before you can react, the smaller ship explodes under a barrage of laser fire from the larger craft. Several other ships are also in the area. Many of the ships, including the corvette, have no markings and transmit no transponder codes.

The PCs have stumbled into a pirate's trap. Using a common practice of moving massive objects into known space lanes, the pirates have forced several merchant freighters out of hyperspace to raid. The pirates' ships include a Corellian corvette to protect their freighters. Only the pirate ships have no transponder codes.

The PCs are not the first to be bumped out of hyperspace. Five stock light freighters are in the area, and one other was destroyed as it tried to escape when the PCs arrived. Two of the five freighters have been disabled, but can be repaired. Another is dead in space with no life aboard. The final two are being boarded and their cargoes transferred. These freighters have no damage and appear unarmed.

After the destruction of the freighter, the corvette turns its attention to the Arion Star.

As you see the last remains of the blasted freighter disintegrate into space, your communication system comes to life.

"Freighter Arion Star, power down all engine and defensive systems and prepare to be boarded. Any other action will cause your destruction."

To back up its threat, the corvette begins to move into firing range. Also, a freighter stands ready to remove cargo from your ship.

Although the PCs' ship is empty, the pirates don't know this. They are very serious about their threat, and both the corvette and freighter would normally open fire should the PCs move to escape or attack. However, at the moment the Rebels make their move—whether to surrender or fight—an Imperial fleet arrives. It, too, has been caught in the pirates' trap.

When the PCs react to the pirates' ultimatum, read the following:

Suddenly, several more ships enter from hyperspace. But, instead of freighters, this time the pirates have caught an Imperial fleet—the large Imperial class Star Destroyer being your first indication of this. The other ships in the fleet are five customs frigates.

The pirate freighters transferring cargo immediately begin to withdraw their docking shafts in preparation for a jump to lightspeed, while the corvette moves to defend them.

A minor battle ensues as the pirate freighters jump to hyperspace and the corvette weakly defends them from the Star Destroyer. Just as the last freighter escapes, the corvette is destroyed by the Imperials. The Imperials then begin to investigate the remaining ships, i.e. the freighters caught in the trap, including the PCs' ship.

If the PCs attempt to escape into hyperspace, remind them that it is impossible because they were bumped out of hyperspace by the asteroid, and must recalculate their position, taking one day before their next jump, (see page 59 of *Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game.* Should they try anyway, the ship's nav computer will not allow the jump. There is a built-in safety feature which cannot be bypassed short of several days of work.

Imperial Customs Frigate
Crew: 16
Passengers: room for 6 in brig
Hyperdrive Multiplier: ×1
Nav Comp: Yes
Hyperdrive Backup: Yes
Sublight Speed: 8D
Maneuverability: 5D
Hull: 5D
Shields: 7D
Weapons:
Four Laser Cannons, each:
Fire Control: 6D
Damage: 5D
Proton Torpedoes:
Fire Control: 6D
Damage: 9D

If the Rebels attempt to flee the Imperial fleet in realspace, the Imperials send two customs frigates in pursuit; the other Imperial ships investigate the other freighters.

If the PCs do not try to leave the area, only one customs frigate is sent to deal with them.

If the Rebels are foolish enough to attack the Imperial fleet, consider the adventure over. There is no way they can flee, and they are heavily out gunned. They will be either captured or destroyed by the Star Destroyer and its TIE fighters.

Read the following when the customs frigate investigates the Arion Star.

Your ship's communications comes to life again.

"Attention freighter Arion Star, this is the Imperial Customs Frigate Watcher. We have you on our screen. You will disengage all drives and prepare to be boarded for standard inspection. After your ship is checked for all necessary permits and legitimacy of cargo, you will be allowed to continue on to your destination using navigational data provided by the Star Destroyer Revenge."

The Imperial demands leave the PCs several options. It should be apparent, however, that combat is a very unwise choice. If the Rebels decide to allow the Imperials to board, the frigate will dock with the Arion Star. The inspection team consists of one Imperial customs officer and five stormtroopers. The officer asks the PCs various questions about their ship registration, weapons and shielding permits, destination, and runs checks on their personal IDs. One stormtrooper guards the officer while the other four troopers search the ship for contraband.

This is very much a role playing situation. The officer's questions should imply almost anything. The stormtroopers should be suspicious about various components on the ship. The permits the PCs have on the ship have almost expired, and the IDs will be checked very carefully. In the end, all permits and identification will hold up, but the GM should try to make the players worry a bit.

Do not hesitate to have the officer levy fines against NavStar Transport for any minor technical violations (the communications pack requires another permit due to its modified ability to transmit more powerful signals, etc.). Also, a minor system malfunction might occur, if dramatically appropriate.

After the inspection, the PCs' current coordinates are transmitted to them from the Star Destroyer. The Imperial ships will not follow them nor be concerned with them any longer.

Episode Two: Greyman's Planet

When the PCs arrive in the Soarin System, read the following:

After exiting hyperspace, your ship approaches the industrialized world of Greyman's Planet. Before you begin your landing cycle, however, a voice hails you on your communication system.

"NavStar Transport Freighter Arion Star, please transmit your landing permit code. If you have no permit, you will enter a parking orbit and wait until an application can be processed."

The PCs have the correct permit. If they transmit it, continue with the following:

"Thank you Arion Star. You have been assigned landing pad seven in the freighter port. Please follow the landing beacon now."

The PCs land in the freighter port of the large spaceport. The spaceport includes a passenger terminal and planetary patrol station. The passenger terminal is concerned with the departure and arrival of passenger liners and their shuttles. The patrol station is the local planetary patrol craft port, with several small frigates and Z-95 starfighters.

Having landed your craft, you walk down the ship's ramp into the spaceport. Unlike many of the civilian ports you have visited, this has no separate landing bays. Around you are several other freighters, where workers are busy loading and unloading goods of all kinds. Apparently, the port has a built-in warehouse for easy access for the traders.

As you look about, you notice people moving equipment, foodstuffs and other items on repulsor sleds and by hand, while uniformed personal try to direct them. You realize it all seems very chaotic.

If the Arion Star was damaged, or the guidance system problem was found, the PCs can have spaceport technicians repair the ship. If the ship was severely damaged, the repairs will take it into the heavily damaged category. Any systems which were damaged are repaired. The PCs should arrange repairs before meeting with Stern. When they are ready to proceed, continue.

After getting your bearings, you thread your way through the chaos of the port, following your instructions to the meeting place. It is a small tavern located near the entrance to the port, apparently catering specifically to offworlders. It is obvious a variety of races visit the place. As

you enter, a small man sitting in a booth signals to you.

After the PCs sit down at the booth, the man introduces himself as Ral Yekkiv, an associate of Roger Stern. He informs the Rebels that Stern has recently been arrested as a Rebel sympathizer and that the supplies they were to pick up have been impounded in the starport warehouse, where they will remain until they can be inspected and their destination verified as legitimate. Stern himself is being held in the Imperial garrison outside the city. Ral makes it clear the PCs should not involve themselves in any rescue attempt. The PCs are to stick to their current supply mission. Therefore, they must get the supplies out of impoundment. Ral gives the PCs information about the port, but will not help with any operations. He is too busy overseeing the rescue of Stern, which he does not believe concerns the PCs.

Ral gives the PCs the location of the supplies in the warehouse, and the proper shipping documents on a datapad. No invoice is included, as the Rebels are posing as shippers only, not the buyer. The shipping number of their cargo is included in the documentation and can be found on each of the cargo crates (RS-NST 791).

The arrest of Stern has thrown the entire freighter port into a state of confusion. Because of the enormous volume of goods his operation handles, the planetary government and spaceport control is having trouble shutting down the business and impounding the freight. Some of the goods are being removed as evidence for Stern's "trial" (more likely a cover up for Imperial confiscation), while the rest remains under guard in the spaceport.

The government is still taking possession of some cargo due to be shipped today, much to the traders' displeasure. There is also confusion over which cargo is legitimate and which is to be impounded. The PCs' supplies, however, are definitely impounded. All of this information can be gained by asking a few questions of the directing officers and other freighter captains.

The Rebels' shipment is currently located in the freight warehouse, next to the freighter port. Although there is no guard posted, there are many of the directors wandering throughout the area, trying to keep the various cargoes moving to the correct places. Some crates are being removed from freighters and returned to the warehouse. Others are being taken from the warehouse to an Imperial storage facility. A very few shipments have passed inspection and are being loaded on departing freighters.

There is confusion about exactly which shipments go where. Often, the directors give conflicting orders and wind up arguing with the freighter captains, loading personnel, and other directors. There are also a couple of head directors who have comlinks to communicate with the warehouse office. These directors make the final decisions on the location and disposition of shipments.

When the PCs locate their supplies, they discover several metal crates.

- 1m cube metal crate—assorted droid spare parts.
- 1m cube metal crate—vehicle tool kit, other tools.
- 2.5m × 1m × 1m metal crate—power fence parts, post sections. A false bottom hides a repeating blaster (6D) with tripod.
- 2.5m × 1m × 1m metal crate—power fence parts, post sections. A false bottom hides four blaster carbines (5D).
- 1m cube metal crate—power fence generator.
- 1m cube metal crate—well-packed computer hardware.
- 1m cube metal crate—well-packed holographic projector.

An Imperial tracker (*Cracken's Rebel Field Guide, page 62*) is hidden in the assorted droid spare parts and only can be found by making a very difficult (22) Search roll or very difficult (28) Perception roll. The tracker is a tube, 10 cm long, which can be easily destroyed. The Imperials are attempting to locate the destinations of Stern's merchandise, as his operation is extensive.

The false bottom crates can be detected by making a moderate (12) Search roll or moderate (15) Perception roll. The PCs should not open the crates until after they have loaded their ship, but do not stop them. If they open the crates in front of a director, he immediately calls the security team for assistance. Once the team has arrived, he will have the crates closed and try to take the Rebels in for questioning.

The PCs must devise a plan to load their shipment, preferably without arousing suspicion about their own front company. If they use a plan which will obviously cause the Imperials to suspect the company has Rebel sympathizers, allow them to continue with the plan, but try to let them know somehow that they are in jeopardy of blowing their cover. They might not discover this until after leaving the planet.

Possible plans might include dressing as loaders and trying to remove the cargo in the confusion. They might also try to convince one of the directors that their cargo has been mistakenly impounded, or is to be moved to their ship for removal to another storage area.

Any attempt to remove the supplies will be met with the protests of a director. He will tell the PCs that these supplies have been impounded and cannot be removed until inspected and their destination checked, a process that requires several days. He can be convinced (or conned, easy 10) otherwise. Before the Rebels reach their ship, another director will question their activities, and he, too, can be conned (moderate 15).

Just before the PCs finish loading, a senior director shows up, demanding to know who gave authorization for moving this shipment. He orders the PCs to remove the cargo from their vessel and return it to the warehouse immediately. He can be conned (very difficult 22). If the PCs fail to con or otherwise appease him, he calls the security team. If the PCs launch their ship, he calls spaceport control. If the PCs call for permission to launch, it is denied.

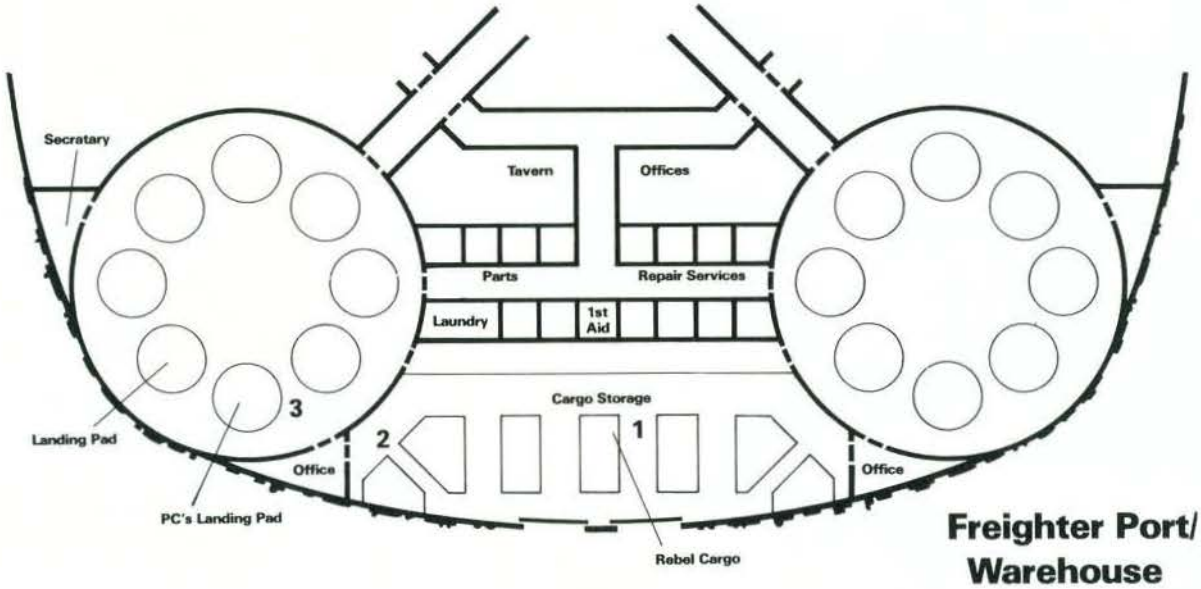
If at any time the Rebels fire their weapons or use them threateningly, a security team will be dispatched to the area. If the security team has trouble with them (fighting, gunfire, etc.), a squad of stormtroopers will be dispatched to the port. However, it will take several rounds for them to get there.

If a fight breaks out, workers and personnel from other ships take cover until it is over. If both the security team and stormtroopers are eliminated by the PCs, another squad of stormtroopers will arrive as the Rebels finish loading their ship.

Directors: All 2D, Bureaucracy 4D, Bargain 4D, Computer Program/Repair 4D. Equipment: Datapad, clip-on ID.

Security (10): STR 2D+2, Blaster 2D+1, Dodge 3D, Melee 3D. All other attribute codes 2D. Equipment: Blaster Pistol (4D).

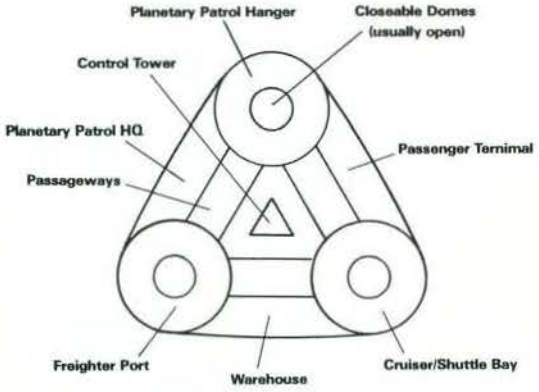
Stormtroopers (8) first squad: STR



Freighter Port/ Warehouse

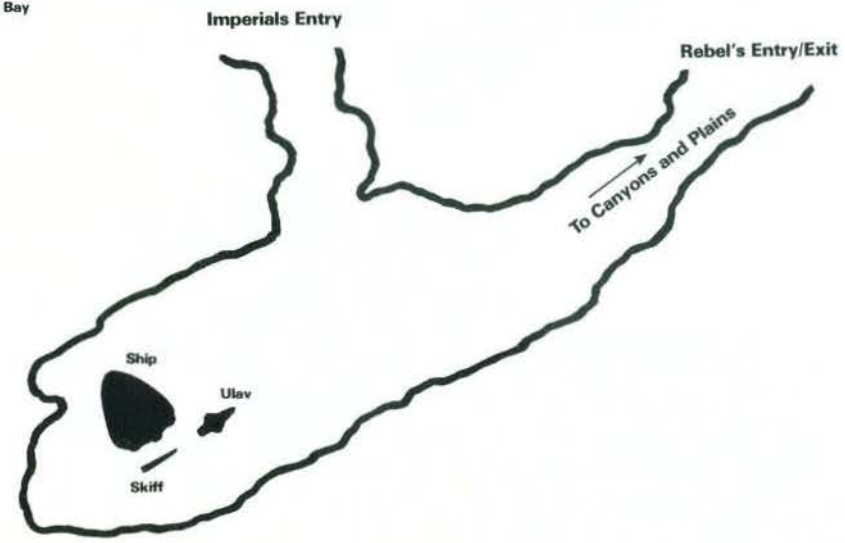
1 1st Director
2 2nd Director
3 Head Director

0 45
Meters



Da'Harrin Spaceport

0 135
Meters



2D/3D*, Blaster 3D, Dodge 3D, DEX 1D, Brawling 3D, Brawling Parry 3D. All other attribute codes 2D. Equipment: Blaster Pistol (4D)

Stormtroopers (8) second squad: STR 2D/3D*, Blaster 3D, Dodge 3D, DEX 1D, Brawling 3D, Brawling Parry 3D. All other attribute codes 2D. Equipment: Blaster Rifle (5D)

* Against damage only, stormtrooper armor.

Episode 3: Escape!

The Rebels will not be given authorization for launch. Therefore, when they take off, an Imperial patrol will be waiting outside the planet's atmosphere.

As the surface of the planet recedes in your viewport, you are hailed by Da'Harrin spaceport control.

"Freighter Arion Star: permission has not been given for your departure. Return immediately to your landing platform for inspection or be shot down."

As you clear the atmosphere, you see four TIE fighters closing fast. And in the distance, you see a frigate approaching at high speed!

It will take four rounds before the PCs' freighter can jump to hyperspace. Unless the PCs return to the planet, the TIEs close and attack. They start at medium range. The Imperial customs frigate will not be in range until four rounds. The frigate will not use its proton torpedoes (which are useless against shields). If the TIEs have little trouble with the PCs' freighter—that is the freighter becomes damaged—the frigate will not open fire, although it will close to firing range.

TIE Fighter
Crew: 1
Passengers: none
Cargo Capacity: 110 kilograms
Hyperdrive Multiplier: none
Hyperdrive Backup: none
Sublight Speed: 5D
Maneuverability: 2D
Hull: 2D
Shields: none
Weapons:
Two Laser Cannons (fire as one)
Fire Control: 2D
Damage: 5D

Imperial Customs Frigate
Crew: 16
Passengers: room for 6 in brig
Hyperdrive Multiplier: x1
Nav Comp: Yes
Hyperdrive Backup: Yes
Sublight Speed: 8D
Maneuverability: 5D
Hull: 5D
Shields: 7D
Weapons:
Four Laser Cannons, each:
Fire Control: 6D
Damage: 5D
Proton Torpedoes:
Fire Control: 6D
Damage: 9D

If the PCs return to the planet, they will be arrested as Rebel sympathizers. Several squads of stormtroopers commanded by an officer are present. Unless the PCs are extremely quick to take off in their ship again, they will be taken into custody. Their shipment will be impounded. And they must either escape from an Imperial prison or spend the rest of their days in a cell.

The likeliest course of action is for the PCs to face down the TIE fighters and attempt to escape.

The Astrogation roll for the jump to hyperspace is difficult (20), as it is a hasty maneuver. Add modifiers if damage is sustained. Standard duration of the jump is two days.

Episode 4: Battle to the Base

The hyperspace trip will pass uneventfully, except for the deteriorating guidance system. On the second day of the trip, have the PCs make a moderate (15) Perception check. If successful, they notice a faint crackling sound coming from a side panel in the cockpit. If investigated, an easy (10) Starship Repair roll will reveal that the guidance system is burning up. There is nothing the PCs can do about it while the ship is in flight.

When the Rebels arrive at the planet, read the following:

At last the ship drops out of hyperspace near the dry, dusty planet of Karinda. With the exception of an occasional lake or small sea, the entire planet appears to be a red-brown color. Following your instructions, you begin your descent to the base.

Unexpectedly, a bright flash bursts from a panel behind the pilot. The smell of melting plastic and shorted circuitry fills the cockpit, all while the pilot begins to have trouble controlling the ship.

The guidance system is burning itself out. The pilot will lose all control very soon and must land immediately. A difficult (20) Piloting roll must be made to keep the ship from crashing. Failure causes all except those PCs who are taking crash positions (the pilots may not) to take 4D damage. PCs in crash positions take 2D damage. The crash is not as critical as it could be because of the dusty soil and lack of vegetation on the planet. If the Piloting check is successful, no damage is taken. The pilot and copilot can combine on the piloting roll. Spending a Force point would be dramatically appropriate.

The guidance system is ruined, whether the ship lands safely or crashes.

After shaking off that landing, you look out the viewport at your surroundings. You have settled in a small valley, from which there seems to be two exits. The crumbling rock walls are very steep.

The outpost hails the Arion Star. The base operator tells the PCs that a skiff and speeder have been dispatched to bring them to the base. The PCs do not know the exact location of the base and must wait for their ride. It will take the speeders an hour to reach the PCs.

The Rebel speeder sent by the base is a ULAV, piloted by a single man (see page 106 of the *Rebel Sourcebook*). The (modified) skiff is piloted by an R2 unit. As the base is still under construction, it is undermanned, which is why the droid was sent as a pilot.

The ULAV pilot is Lt. Wes Gevar, and the droid is R2-F7. Upon arrival, Gevar tells the PCs to load the supplies on the skiff. He ask that one of the PCs ride with him as gunner in the ULAV. The rest will ride on the skiff, although another PC can pilot instead of the droid.

Lt. Wes Gevar, Brash Pilot: DEX 3D, KNO 2D, MEC 4D, PER 3D, STR 3D, TEC 3D

Blaster 5D, Dodge 4D, Repulsorlift Op. 5D, Starship Piloting 6D

Equipment: Blaster Pistol (4D), Macrobinoculars, Comlink

While the PCs were waiting for their

ride, the Imperials traced them to the planet and notified the planet's garrison of the Rebel sympathizers' arrival.

Fortunately for the PCs, because this world is on the Outer Rim and hardly worth Imperial presence, the garrison is small. The garrison sends five biker scouts and a hoverscout (see page 78 of the *Imperial Sourcebook*) to locate and bring in the Rebels. Two of the biker scouts successfully find the heroes, arriving in the valley just after the PCs are loaded up and ready to head to the base.

Before the biker scouts zoom into view, the R2 unit starts beeping wildly as a warning. This gives the PCs one round to make preparations.

One of the scouts' first shots will hit Gevar, wounding him badly enough to keep him from helping the PCs, although he will tell them the droid can lead them to the base and to get going.

The chase is on. Once the PCs' vehicles are moving, the other three biker scouts show up. All will close and fire, especially on the ULAV. The chase begins in the small valley and then continues through a canyon to an open plain. The walls of the valley and canyons are too steep for the speeders. No water flows through the canyon, and there are many twists and turns to make driving difficult. In one place the canyons are only wide enough for one speeder to pass through at a time.

While navigating the canyon at high speed, all pilots must make difficult (20) Repulsorlift Operation rolls. At moderate speeds, moderate (15) rolls must be made, and at slow speeds, no rolls are needed. Failure means the speeder takes collision damage scraping the wall or rocks in the canyon. Speeder bikes crash if they hit the wall.

It takes the ULAV one round to leave the valley and enter the canyon at high speed, two rounds at slow speed. The skiff takes three rounds at high speed, six rounds at slow speed. Navigating the canyon also takes the same amount of time, although high speeds should be discouraged because of the extreme danger involved. After the PCs exit the canyon onto a large, open dusty plain, the Imperial Hoverscout arrives.

Crossing the plain to the base's location will take both the ULAV and skiff longer than combat will last. Not until the combat is finished can the PCs make it to the base.

The use of Force points during this final episode is dramatically appropriate (and probably necessary). Do not forget about the scaling rules for combat between characters and speeders (page 20-21 of the *Rules Companion*). The repeating blaster is a character scale weapon, not speeder.

The Game Master must pay attention to vehicle ceilings when running this combat.

Modified Imperial Ultra-light Assault Vehicle ULAV
Crew: 2
Passengers: None
Scale: Speeder
Body Strength: 2D+2
Ceiling: .6 meters
Speed Code: 4D
Maneuverability: 0
Weapons:
Twin Light Laser Cannons (fire linked-pilot controlled)
Fire Control: 1D
Damage: 2D+2
Concussion Grenade Launcher (pilot controlled)
Fire Control: 1D
Damage: 3D+1
Medium Blaster Cannon (rear gunner, 180 degree firing arc, aft only)
Fire Control: 2D
Damage: 5D

Modified Repulsorlift Transport Skiff
Crew: 1
Passengers: 15
Scale: Speeder
Body Strength: 1D+2
Ceiling: 50 meters
Speed Code: 1D+2
Maneuverability: 0
Weapons: None

Aratech 74-Z Military Speeder Bike (5)
Crew: 1
Passengers: None
Scale: Speeder
Body Strength: 2D
Ceiling: 25 meters
Speed Code: 7D+2
Maneuverability: 6D+4
Weapons:
One Laser Cannon
Fire Control: 4D
Damage: 3D

Mekkun Hoverscout
Crew: 4
Passengers: None
Scale: Speeder
Body Strength: 3D
Ceiling: 1 meter
Speed Code: 7D
Maneuverability: 4D
Weapons:
Heavy Blaster Cannon
Fire Control: 5D
Damage: 6D
Laser Cannon
Fire Control: 5D
Damage: 2D
Concussion Missile Launcher
Fire Control: 6D
Damage: 4D

Stormtrooper Scouts: DEX 2D, KNO 2D, MEC 3D, PER 2D, STR 2D+2, TEC 2D

Blaster 4D, Dodge 4D, Brawling 3D, Speeder Bike Op. 3D+2. All other abilities and skills are 2D.

Equipment: Blaster Pistol (4D), Scout Armor, Comlink

When the battle is over, the PCs can continue on to the base. If the PCs' transportation has been damaged, it will take them several hours to walk there.

> Rounding a large, rocky hill, you enter a canyon. At the far end, you see a large cave. Construction sounds come from within it. At last, you have arrived at the Karinda Outpost.

The base commander, Colonel Jarvis Tala, greets the PCs and thanks them for their help. The supplies they brought include new computers which will analyze the data from the listening outpost they are establishing and will help them intercept Imperial Outer Rim communications. The other supplies are routine parts and equipment. Should the Imperial tracker still be among the droid parts, it is easily found by the Rebel technicians. They will simply have the tracking device taken elsewhere very quickly and hope that the Imperials will miss the base while looking for the tracker. But that is for another adventure.

Skill Point Award: Give the PCs 4 to 7 skill points to distribute, based on their success with the mission. Only award 7 points if the supplies reached the base undamaged.

The Living Galaxy

Be A Stellar Game Master—The Easy Way (Part 2)

by Roger E. Moore

I hadn't meant to write a second column on special game-mastering techniques for science fiction role playing games, but I had so many notes left over from last month's column that I decided to give it a try. Being the best GM you can be means putting in extra time and effort. But you'd be surprised at how easy some techniques are to use in your campaign. This column focuses on some of those easy "tricks" that can be added to any science fiction campaign—with a bonus trick, a harder one, for those GMs who want an extra creative twist for their games.

Haven't The Foggiest Idea

There is a subtle point at which a role playing adventure loses its mystery and excitement for players, and that's the moment when those players get the idea that the GM is telling them everything that's happening, the whole truth and nothing but. The very second that the universe becomes reliable, a role playing game becomes a "roll playing" game in which flipping the little polyhedral dice is all that matters. The excitement is largely over, because everyone knows what's happening and the surprises are gone.

The times when I've seen this happen are usually when the GM wants to move the action along toward some particular goal, and he is smoothing the way by squashing the story tension flat. Maybe the GM rapidly plows through a firefight with terrorists in a warehouse because he wants to keep things moving along but is unsure of how to handle a complex combat set-up. "Everyone will like it better if we get through this quickly," he thinks, so the GM lets the players know how many hit points the terrorists have, exactly where they are hiding, what they are armed with, etc. Maybe the terrorists also bunch themselves up, take no cover, and refuse to surrender or run. The firefight might be vaguely interesting, sort of like playing a low-grade video game, but it won't have a tenth of the punch it could have had.

What helps instead is for the GM to let the scenario play out naturally and "fog" it. Give the results of certain actions and observations made by the player characters in vague terms. Leave things a little on edge, a little on the unknown side. Keep descriptions of the physical environment relatively detailed and clear to keep the realism high, but leave room for doubt when the situation is tense. The tension will grow, not fade. It's a nasty trick, and it works like a charm. (I admit that I've seen this technique recommended by several other gaming writers, but I rarely see it being used in game play!)

In the previous scenario, a GM using fogging wouldn't give the players a clue about the terrorists unless a die roll revealed that a character has noticed a hiding terrorist, or unless the characters were surprised and ambushed. If the GM wishes to avoid a complete wipe-out of player characters but wants the tension to stay high, he could tell one player (after intently rolling a die but ignoring the result) that her scout sees a packing crate move, apparently by itself, high on a shelf in the warehouse. Maybe someone's up there—but the GM lets the player come to that conclusion on her own. Not letting the players know exactly what's up by not coming right out and telling them what's up—adding a little fog to the picture—is a scenario energizer.

When you "fog" a scenario, you don't want to obscure everything. If a character performs a relatively basic action or takes a careful look at an object, you don't want to frustrate the player by always giving vague results ("It *might* be red."). Some reliability and predictability are good and generally make the campaign more "realistic" and believable. Some players, too, can't tolerate frustration very well, and you'll have to judge how much tension they can take before they get angry and stop having fun. But you don't *always* have to be specific when the stakes are high.

Example 2: A spacefaring character is searching a starship's engine room for a time bomb that a passenger has confessed to planting. The excited player says, "She's searching really hard. Does she find it?" The GM *could* just say, "There's no bomb there—mark off five minutes and try somewhere else." Not touching the dice while saying this indicates that the GM *knows* there's no bomb there, so the player has complete certainty that the bomb is somewhere else. The GM is trying to move the scenario along, and the player knows this, which defuses the tension.

However, the GM could say—after looking down and rolling some dice with an expression of considerable interest on his face, though he knows the bomb is elsewhere—"She spends five minutes tearing apart the room, looking through lockers, under tables, and in places between the stardrive mounts, but she can't seem to find anything unusual." Though this was a more specific response, the GM isn't giving the player the information she was hoping for—the certainty of knowing if a bomb is present. This, of course, fuels the tension in the game like nothing else. Simply fogging your response conjures up a nightmare for that player, who is then torn between searching somewhere else or continuing to hunt through the engine room, possibly with the bomb's detonation time closing in.

As you can see, fogging works best when used during high-tension scenarios, such as searches, chases, combat, and other time-pressured events when every second counts. More examples of deliberate fogging in pressured situations include these:

Q: "When I finish putting the tourniquet on my leg, I put my back against a tree and raise my laser rifle. Are any more of those bigfang lizards around?"

A: "You can't see any through the thick foliage around you. Your heart is beating so loudly that you aren't even sure if you could hear one coming."

Note: The GM didn't say there *weren't* any bigfangs. She just said the character didn't *see* any. Again, you can see that though the response was vague in terms of certain knowledge, it was specific in terms of describing the environment and sensory clues.

Q: "I check his pulse. Is Jack still alive?"

A: "He doesn't seem to be breathing. His skin is clammy, and his lips are turning blue. You can't immediately tell

if there's a pulse."

Note: The GM is describing the specific symptoms of deep shock with a loss of respiration. Jack might well be alive, but the character who found Jack is going to be sweating bullets trying to bring Jack around—a much more arresting situation than what would have come from simply saying, "Yes, Jack's alive."

Q: "I try to identify the object on ship's radar. Is it a missile?"

A: "The object is moving at a fast, steady velocity, but the radar picture is weak. The object is either very small, has an unreflective surface, or is using electronic countermeasures to hide its image."

Note: The radar image now has very concrete but spooky qualities, making the episode riveting. The player must have his character judge whether the radar object is a missile or not—just as anyone else would do in reality. I mean, the character can't really *see* the object and know if it's a missile, can he?

Any one of the previous three players' questions could have been answered by a simple yes or no. Instead, each GM chose to make the player sweat it out for a little while more. Even if the first player becomes assured that the bigfangs have left his mercenary character alone, and the second player successfully gives Jack first aid, and the third one finds enough evidence to recognize the radar object as just an easily avoided meteoroid, the players still won't know when or if the bigfangs will return, if Jack has more serious medical problems, or if the "meteoroid" is really a disguised hydrogen bomb. But they'll find out—when the GM's ready!

In writing about special GM's techniques for running AD&D® RAVENLOFT® adventures, Bruce Nesmith advocates a certain amount of exaggeration and even outright lying to players during situations of extreme tension and horror; see his *Game Wizards* article in DRAGON® Magazine issue #162, pages 79-80. "Fogging" the description of nonplayer characters (NPCs), monsters, animals, and aliens that the heroes encounter is also detailed in the RAVENLOFT appendix to the AD&D game's *Monstrous Compendium,* in the "Encounters in Ravenloft" section. This is basically the old trick of never calling an orc an "orc," calling it instead a "bestial manlike figure with squinty eyes, greenish-gray skin, and filth-covered armor." Never call a bigfang a bigfang if you can get away with calling it "a blur of needle-sharp teeth in wide-open jaws, with two cold black gems for eyes"—a great description to give to an unfortunate spacefarer about to have his face bitten off in a surprise attack.

You get the idea. Let the players guess the identity of who or what they've just met, unless they've seen so many bigfangs that they'd know them anywhere. Even then, there's always room for a little mystery:

GM: "The bigfang is merely watching you, making no aggressive moves. You notice after a moment that it is holding a laser pistol in its right foreclaws, the barrel aimed directly at your stomach."

Player: "What? You mean like it's *intelligent?*"

Old Characters Never Die

Part of the fun in traveling the universe lies in meeting interesting people. The NPCs in the GM's command can lead heroes into adventures, rescue them from dire straits, steal their money, offer them clues, and make genuine attempts to kill them. As everyone knows, GMs can become as attached to certain NPCs as players are to their own characters. Having well-crafted NPCs is important in any campaign.

Interesting NPCs are easy to make if you create them from player characters. Now and then, borrow the character sheets of the players in your group and copy them. Fiddle with the statistics a little, change the names and a few possessions, and presto—all-new NPCs are born. Because PCs are often heavily armed and equipped, they offer more balance in play than the NPCs in most official modules. You can also take player characters killed during the campaign and rework them, borrowing the character sheets before the players dispose of them.

Borrowing and copying the characters of players in other gaming groups is also a nice touch. Imagine your players' heroes meeting a group of hired killers, all of whom were derived from other players' heavily armed heroes! Finally, if you have friends as GMs in other gaming groups using the same rules, get into an exchange program by making up intriguing NPCs and passing them around, or trading copies of your groups' character sheets.

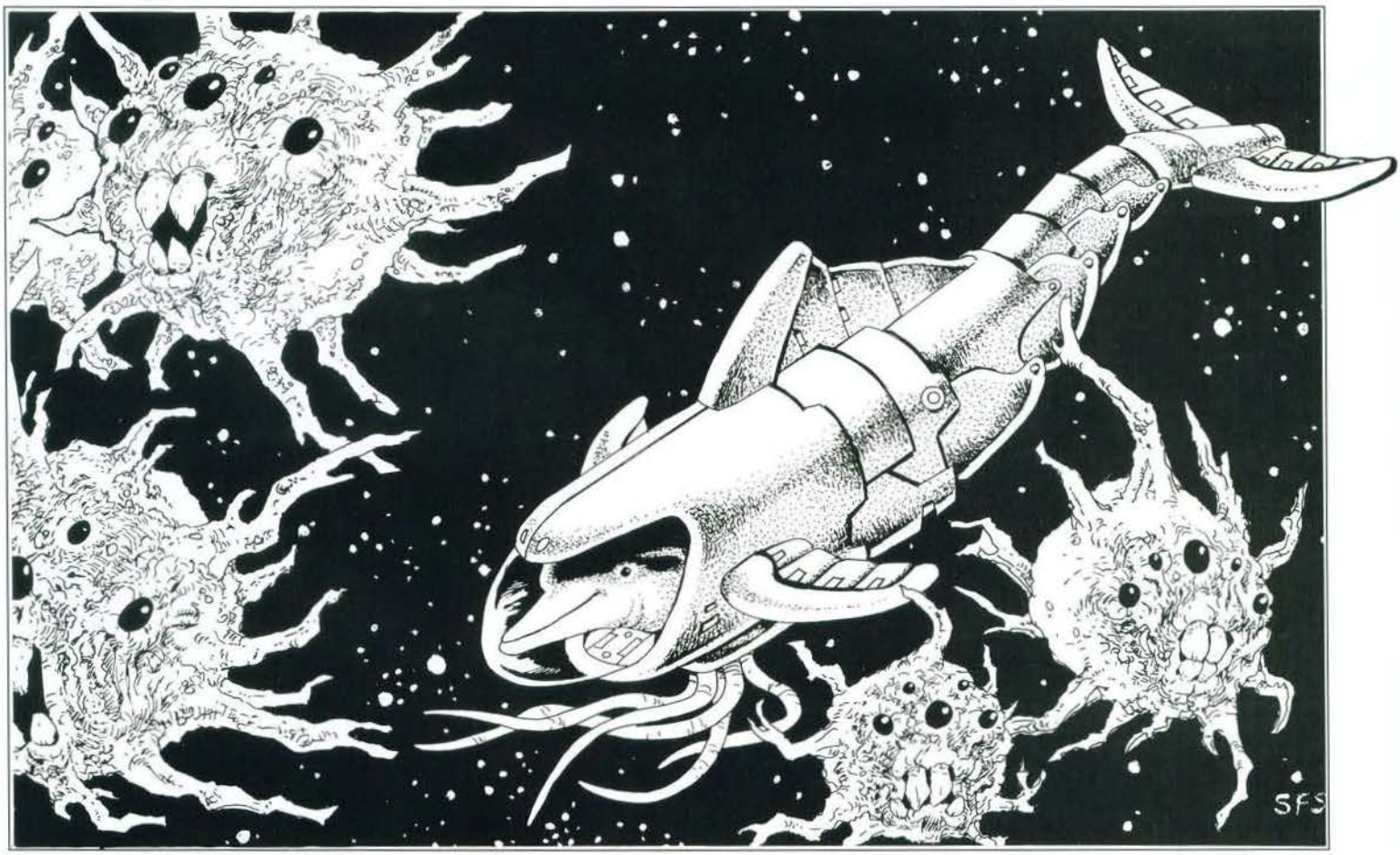
If player characters are retired during the course of a campaign, get the players' permission to use the characters as NPCs in future games. This lends continuity to a campaign, especially if you can role play an NPC just as it was once role played by its original player. Powerful, rich NPCs generated this way make great campaign hooks for many future adventures ("I have a little mission for you. . . ."). You may find that the players especially appreciate this sort of continuity in their characters' lives: There *is* life after retirement. If you trust the players to do it well, you can even have them role play their retired characters when meeting the current group of heroes. I've seen this trick used during fantasy campaigns, particularly with retired, cranky wizards who sent younger characters off in search of artifacts, parts of dangerous and disgusting monsters for magical research, and the like. Science fiction characters can do much the same things ("Interested in some easy cash? Well, I'm looking for a rare species of man-eating fungus that grows on Midgard B, and I was wondering if you and your friends . . .").

Some Red Herrings Taste Great

Many GMs have heard about using red herrings, but they may have only a slight inkling of some of the problems involved in using them. In gaming, a red herring is a false lead, a (usually temporary) diversion to keep the heroes from attaining the real goals of an adventure. There is one primary problem with using them: It can frustrate the players so much that they will happily sell the GM into slavery before an adventure is concluded ("You let us rescue the *wrong guy*?!").

Still, you don't want players to trust everything and everyone. You want them to think their way through a campaign, to have a chance to complete the adventure using their cleverness and get their just rewards without having those rewards spoon-fed to them. Some red herrings are good for an adventure, too—for example, if the heroes are to be deliberately mislead by some villains and must fight their way out of a trap, they could return and surprise the rest of the villains later. I have a few suggestions, then, for feeding the players red herrings:

1. If the false lead is being deliberately left by NPCs to throw the player characters off the track, give some clues



to the players that all is not right. These clues have to be subtle, but telling. If the normally close-mouthed and hostile secret police suddenly become very helpful, an alarm should go off in the players' heads. If a typed note implicating an alien official is found at a murder scene, but it's written in a language or dialect that the alien is very unlikely to know, something's not adding up. During World War II, a group of Nazi saboteurs, landed by submarine, operated on the American east coast; they were found out only because one of the saboteurs gave as his hometown the name of a city that no longer existed! If the players show a little initiative, they should have a fair shot at finding out that All Is Not As It Seems. If they go ahead and follow the red herring anyway, you can offer more clues later on in increasing doses. If that doesn't work—oh, well, at least you tried.

2. If the false lead is the result of faulty information or investigation on the part of the players, give them enough clues so that they can figure it out and get on the right track during the same gaming session. This may sound like you are guiding the adventure—and you are—but it avoids a lot of trouble later. Do what you can to keep the wrong path fairly short to avoid a long and tiresome divergence from the real plot line. If the players misread a code and come to the wrong conclusion about where the villain's hideout is, give them enough clues to figure out they've made a mistake, but be reasonable and don't blurt it out in the middle of the adventure ("You idiots, you're going the wrong way!"). As they rush to the wrong side of town and invade the wrong building, have them come upon a squadron of surprised nuns running a homeless shelter there, or maybe just have the building be abandoned or under renovation, with work crews on site or kids playing tag in the empty halls. Let the characters wander around and get the picture, but let them draw their own conclusions. Have onlookers react predictably, fleeing and hiding if guns are drawn, etc.

3. Some red herrings of brief duration can fuel tension. Most fantasy-game GMs should be aware of the old, trite, only partly unintentional trick in which the players realize which door a GM wants them to go through by noticing how much detail the GM gives each door. The bland, "nothing special" doors are, of course, unimportant to the adventure; the "iron-bound oaken door with a red sigil painted at eye level" is the one the GM wants the player characters to go through.

To really mess things up, add specific detail more often in the adventure, at times when it can really throw the players off. For example, suppose the spacefaring character in the bomb-hunting scenario mentioned earlier decides to stay and search the engine room a few minutes more. The GM looks down behind his GM's screen, rolls a die or two, frowns, and says, "Zarabeth finds a black leather tote bag at the bottom of the chief engineer's locker. She doesn't recall seeing this item before. A faint ticking noise can be

heard coming from the bag." The chief engineer is the only NPC on the crew (and he's somewhere else on the ship), so no player can inadvertently speak up and identify the bag. Is the time bomb inside it? The GM seems to be implying just that. Most players would have their characters yell for assistance or open the bag on their own—only to discover (after dunking the bag and its contents in a bucket of water) that the bag holds an electronic metronome that was accidentally turned on by being jostled around. This false climax can easily lead to a more dramatic climax if the heroes soon find another ticking device in the engine room and treat it with a little less caution:

Player 1: "Oh, so this is just a clock radio, right? Here, Joel, you look at it. I'll check the closet."

Player 2: "Okay, so I'm looking at it. Where's the chief engineer? Hey, Fred, is this yours?"

GM: (as Fred, coming in door): "What's going on here?"

Player 2: "This your clock radio?"

GM: (Acts confused.) "Nah. I got a watch that wakes me up. Why are you guys going through my stuff?"

Player 2: "Uh-oh." (speaks quickly to the GM) "Hey, I'm looking at this clock radio *real carefully.* What do I notice?"

GM: "Well, it doesn't have the correct time. It reads 11:59, and it has a little second-counter that is ticking softly toward midnight. Right now (GM checks his watch, which has a second hand), you have 43 seconds left. What are you doing?"

Either the clock radio is the real bomb and the heroes have 43 seconds left to defuse or get rid of it before they turn into subatomic particles, or it's not. In any event, the heroes are going to have the most panic-stricken 43 seconds of their lives. The GM, who invented the clock radio on the spur of the moment just to drop a red herring into the group, can easily use this event to send the tension in the scenario through the roof. (What about the real bomb? Oh, that was a red herring, too. The passenger who confessed to planting the bomb is mentally disturbed and made it all up. Or the passenger was angry with one of the crewmen and just made it all up for harassment's sake, planting the clock radio to fool everyone. Or, best of all, the passenger wanted to mislead the heroes, drawing their attention away from some other event of greater and more deadly importance, like a hijacking or robbery.

Red herrings, carefully used, are wonderful bits to add to any adventure. You don't want to frustrate the players to death, but you do want to keep them on their toes.

Upload & Download

Famed TSR game designer David "Zeb" Cook suggested this technique during a seminar he gave with me at the ICON 17 convention last year in Iowa City. For about an hour just before each gaming session starts, carefully review all of your notes from the last session and get yourself into the proper mood with the proper notes. Trying to start a game right after you've been running around the room setting out soft drinks, talking with friends about work, playing with your cat, and so forth is very difficult. "Uploading" your adventure allows you to get the group more quickly into the action.

Likewise, spend an hour right after the end of each gaming session writing down all that happened, making all the notes you'll need to maintain continuity in the game the next time your group gets together. Jot down details of the adventure that you need to remember, such as which hero had the maps last, who was suffering from mild radiation poisoning, and where the heroes hid the gold they found. Players can't always be trusted to remember details, except when it's to their advantage.

This may sound like a couple of minor points, but you'd be surprised (or maybe you wouldn't be surprised) at how often important details of an adventure get lost in the cracks. I was in an adventure once when it suddenly became very important to recall where one of my deceased characters was buried. I hadn't the faintest idea, and neither did anyone else in the group—not even the GM for that game session! You need to get the information straight as soon as possible, then keep it where you can find it easily later on. Among other things, this lets you take relatively minor incidents from several adventuring episodes and link them together as part of yet another background plot that will eventually snare the heroes.

The "Fill In The Blanks" Trick

One last (and more complicated) gaming trick here was suggested to me by a gamer at the ICON 17 convention last year, and I deeply regret that I did not get the guy's name who thought it up (thanks anyway!). This guy ran a superhero game campaign, and he wanted to do something creative to come up with homemade scenarios.

What he did was to go to one of his friends and ask the guy to give him the name of a place on Earth, anyplace. Then he went to another friend and asked him for an activity. Then he took these two pieces of information and tried to figure out an adventure that made use of both. For example, he got "the Falkland Islands" and "playing miniature golf" as responses; he then sat down and made up a scenario in which a special top-secret substance had been carried aboard a British ship sunk during the Falkland Islands war a few years ago, and it was going to be recovered and turned over to a criminal gang by super-villains in disguise who would pretend to be playing miniature golf.

This concept of taking several random, apparently unrelated things and working them together into a scenario is actually a very sophisticated and challenging technique. It is the mental equivalent of working out on weight machines to build your arm and chest muscles. I strongly recommend that you use some variation of this system to strengthen your creative mental muscles. For instance, you could ask friends for (or randomly generate) the names of a famous person, place, and item, then link all three together in your science fiction scenario. You are free to make up equivalents of these things for your adventure, such as a military leader with the personality of General George S. Patton Jr., a planet with a city like Chicago, and an alien musical instrument resembling a piano. How would *you* tie these together into an adventure you made up on your own?

This technique is easy to use, though you'll still have lots of work left to do afterwards in writing up the adventure. Still, I admire this one very much for its basic simplicity and originality. You are bound to get some highly entertaining adventures from using it!

That's all for this column. Next month: something different from a new part of the science fiction universe—alternate worlds..

The New Rogues Gallery

The Rat Catcher Of Ravens Bluff

by Gary M. Williams

Exterminator of Vermin of All Sizes and Persuasions. Our Motto, When the Pests in Their Lair, Aldo is There!

Jedderk Aldo

0 Level Male Human

STR: 16
INT: 15
WIS: 10
DEX: 10
CON: 15
CHR: 10

AC Normal: 8 (padded armor)
AC Rear: 8
Hit Points: 5
Alignment: Chaotic Neutral
Languages: Common, smattering of Kobold
THAC0: 20
Age: 42
Height: 6'2"
Weight: 280 lbs.
Hair/Eyes: Black/Brown
Weapon Proficiencies: Dagger
Nonweapon Proficiencies: Animal lore (14), animal training (12), set snares (13), tracking (11)

Jedderk Aldo, a third-generation exterminator, became the sole owner of the Rat-Catcher business upon the death of his father. Jedderk began learning the business while still a child.

Usually sleeping days, Aldo spends his nights prowling deep in the Living City's sewer system, eliminating rats, mice, and other kinds of crawling or flying vermin, both large and small. There are very few types of creatures he will not attempt to exterminate—with the help of a few well placed traps, or his trusty kobold assistants, Snarr and Gartt.

The exterminator is armed with an impressive array of traps, snares and poisons which he employs to catch his prey. He checks his strategically placed traps in the sewer system nightly, usually after midnight. In the early evenings he checks the traps and snares that he has set in businesses and homes that have contracted him.

Snarr and Gartt accompany Aldo on his rounds. He discovered the dim-witted kobold pair living in a section of sewer beneath the business district. Finding them rather harmless and eager to work, he quickly secured permits for them. He enjoys sending them on special jobs that require slithering down drainpipes and through crawlways too narrow for his own bulky form.

Aldo pays the kobolds a copper piece for every rat they catch and deliver to him alive. He sells the fattest of the catch to the poorer folk in town to be made into pies.

Aldo can be hired for extermination jobs at five silver pieces a day—plus one silver piece per rat or other small vermin he catches. Rates increase based on the size and aggressiveness of the creatures to be dealt with.

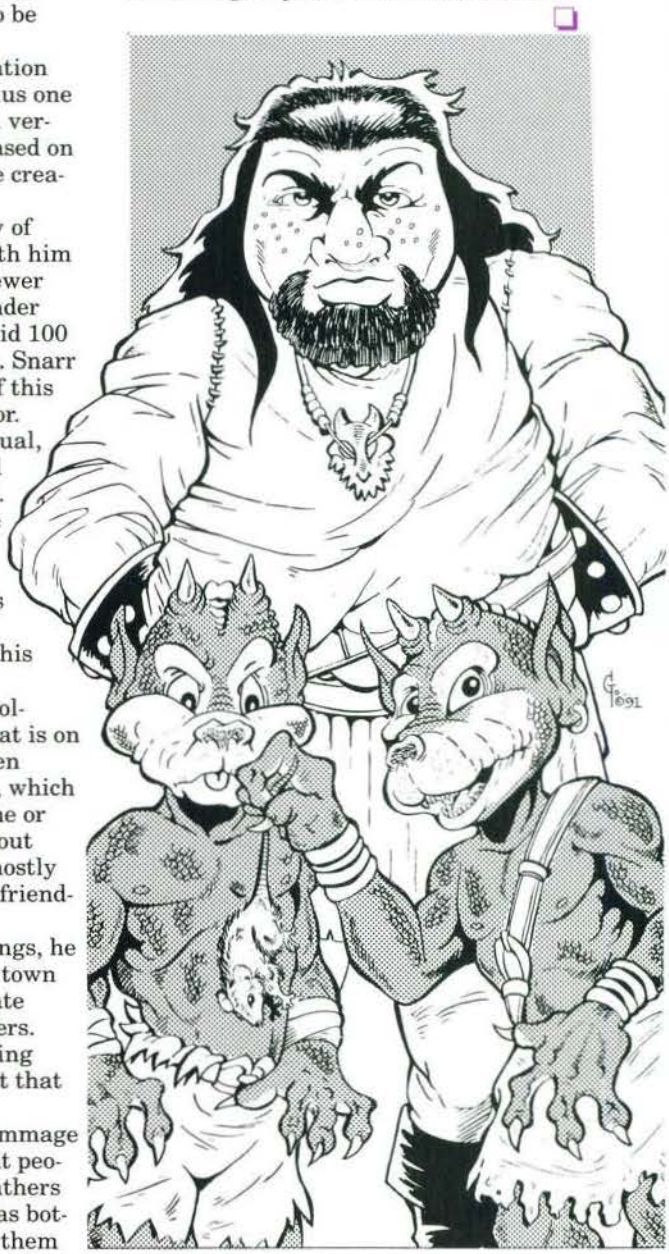
His regular employer is the city of Ravens Bluff, which contracts with him to keep the majority of the city sewer system, (or at least the section under the town hall) rat free. Aldo is paid 100 gold pieces a year for this service. Snarr and Gartt take care of the bulk of this job, with Aldo acting as supervisor.

Aldo is not a very clean individual, usually wearing the same ragged clothes for several days at a time. He is a slow moving man, and he is not known for quick wits. Nevertheless, he has a terrible temper and a short fuse. He likes to drink, and he will frequently carry a flask or two with him on his nightly rounds.

His manners are gruff and unpolished, and he will always say what is on his mind. The rat catcher has been known to speak before he thinks, which has gotten him into trouble a time or two. Aldo is well known throughout town, but has few friends—due mostly to his grubby appearance and unfriendly nature.

Despite his personal shortcomings, he is good at his job. Most people in town unfairly compare him with his late father, a legend among rat catchers. They remark that Aldo has nothing near his father's skill, a comment that Aldo deeply resents.

It is also Aldo's odd habit to rummage through the refuse and trash that people dispose of in the sewer. He gathers the various odds and ends, such as bottles and scraps of rags, and sells them for a few extra coppers. On occasion, a stray gold or silver coin will find its way into the murky waters, and Aldo will quickly snatch it up. Scraps of secret documents or incriminating papers have found their way into Aldo's grubby hands—disposed of by someone foolish enough to think that the sewers are an unretrieveable world below. Blackmail is not beneath Aldo, especially when there's a gold piece or two to be made.



Playing by Mail

How To Get Started And Why You Should Try

by Richard McCoy

For centuries, imaginative people have exchanged correspondence. Many have engaged in riddles, chess games, or logical puzzles through the mail. Many of these competitions lasted for years or even decades. It was logical, then, that role playing games made that same step and tried to reach a market of people who could not afford to travel to conventions or lacked a large number of interested people in their area. During the late 70s, gaming by mail became the new interest.

It wasn't until the 80s that entire companies were set up for the sole purpose of marketing play-by-mail games, or PBM games, for short. PBMs gained quick attention, and the numbers of people interested in playing them jumped astoundingly. Presently, there are hundreds of different PBMs and companies focusing on almost every imaginable game scenario. There are now literally thousands of players involved in PBMs. Gamers in the military initially led the charge. Now, however, more and more "regular" gamers are getting involved, even those who attend conventions and play with a group on a regular basis.

PBM gaming is a broad field, and the beginner often is faced with the question of how to choose a game. In most cases, the person interested in a PBM is either isolated from other gamers (usually by home, job, or military service) or just wants to explore a new type of gaming. While most people have no trouble deciding if PBMs are really for them, it's much tougher to choose a first PBM game. Isolated gamers have an even tougher time discovering which games are worth the money and what companies should be avoided.

My first experience with PBM gaming was when I left my gaming club and went to college. At that time, there were not a lot of sources of information about PBMs. You either took a chance or went by word of mouth. Today there are at least two magazines devoted just to PBMs. I was lucky. I stumbled across an advertisement in a gaming brochure and based on the fact that the game had won several commendations and had hundreds of players, I felt safe in trying it. But in today's market, those are not always the best criteria.

What to Look For

Beginners should judge PBM games according to four criteria: flexibility, instructions, turn results, and cost.

Flexibility: This pertains to the PBM's allowance for individual action and whether you are restricted in your orders or instructions. Most PBMs have some set guidelines or restrictions. They provide a rule book that outlines what can or cannot be done, what orders are used, and how much decision making is done by a human moderator and how much is done by computer.

PBMs run by computer tend to be the least flexible. They work something like your high school "bubble sheets." You choose your actions by filling in the spaces on a card or sheet of paper with a number two pencil. Your sheet or card is fed into a computer, which reads your choices and mathematically determines what occurs. Often the same set of choices will give different results depending on what has previously gone on in the game.

While this method prevents bias by a human moderator and eliminates most mistakes, it tends to limit what you can do. There is little room left for imagination. Computer moderated games are usually strategic, advanced games. They are also the cheapest. However, some recent PBMs are now employing highly advanced computer programs that allow a larger scale of freedom and choices.

People moderated games are the most flexible. You are allowed to write explanations of your actions, use your imagination, respond fully to situations, and your options are only loosely restricted. The moderator reads each individual's orders, compares them to everyone else's, resolves situations, and writes up the responses. This provides results that are much more in depth and enjoyable to read. It also adds a very realistic and human touch to the game. It is the closest you can come to real role playing by mail.

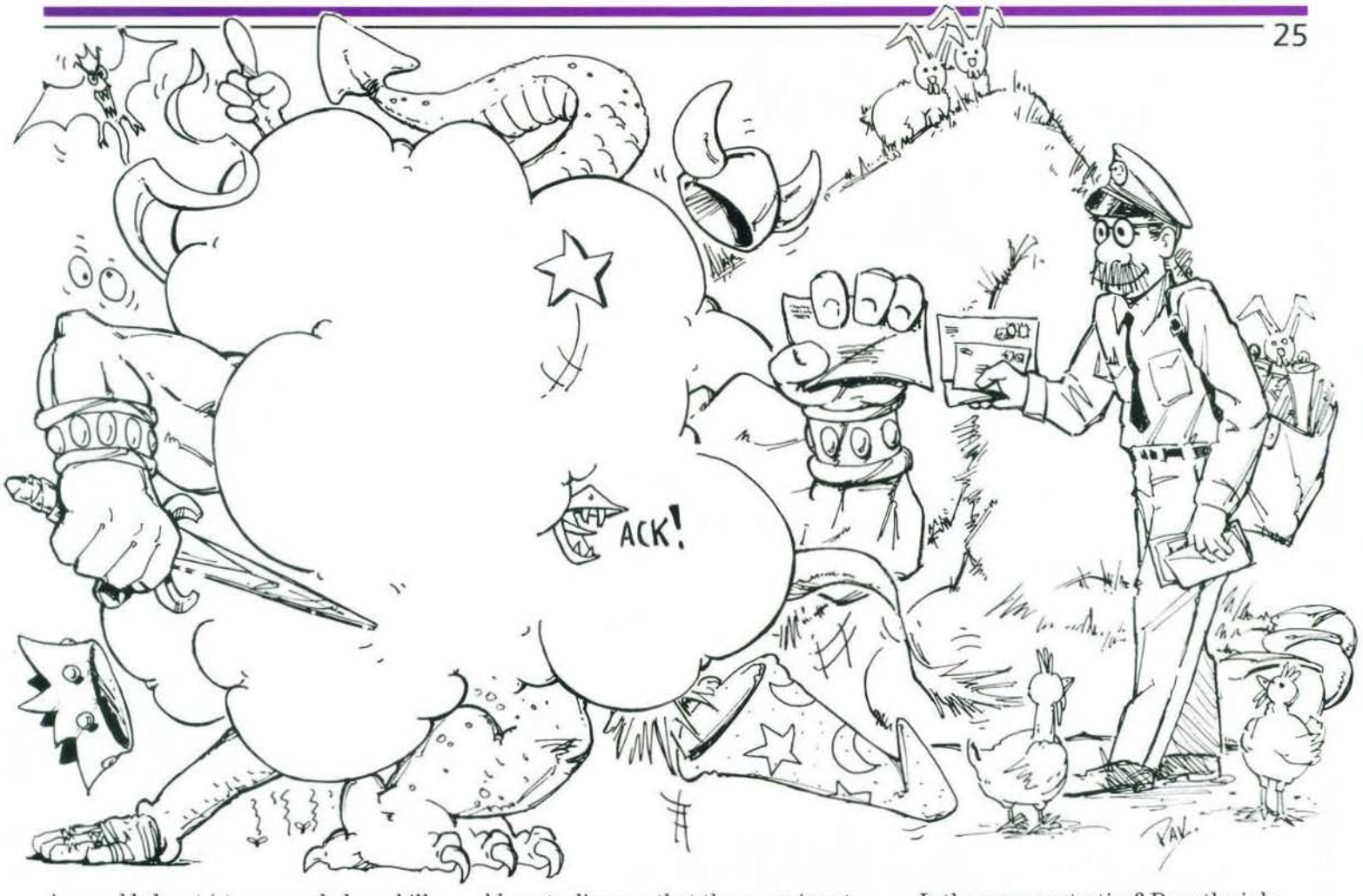
However, human moderators do tend to make mistakes. They are not infallible, and they sometimes have to make judgment calls. There are always trade offs for increased freedom, the most significant being that results take longer. With a computer moderated game, you can have your results back in less than two weeks. With human moderators, they usually take three to four weeks (sometimes more). Also, you pay more for a human moderator due to the extra time and effort it takes to process results. You're paying a real human, not a machine, for its time.

Human moderated games tend to be simulations: fantasy settings, political crisis scenarios, etc. You have to contend with a lot more detail and complexity. These games are usually much more enjoyable and fulfilling, but as noted, have drawbacks in time and cost.

A few companies offer PBMs that are partially computer moderated and partially human moderated. This helps keep the cost down while providing a quicker turn around on results than you would get in a wholly human moderated game. Usually, half of your orders are limited and specifically intended for the computer, and the other half let you ask questions or take actions that require judgments by a person. Very few of these exist. The ones I have dealt with seem to handle it very well and have found a happy medium.

If you are choosing a game for its flexibility, it comes down to a matter of preference. How often do you want to do orders? (Or how often can you afford the money to pay for them?) Are you looking for a game that will allow you to be creative or one that involves logic and strategy? There are few that allow both, at least in the computer moderated games. I tend to lean toward human moderated PBMs for their freedom and creativity.

One other note. You should also consider whether you want to be involved in a lot of correspondence with other players. The human moderated games tend to have a limited number of players. The computer moderated games have dozens or hundreds of players (I am involved in one that has at least 200-300 players). Games this size usually require a lot of contacting other players and coordinating activities. This



is an added cost (stamps and phone bills mount up very quickly), so beware.

Instructions: The first impression you will get from a PBM is its brochure and its player's manual or handbook. You usually can make up your mind about a game based on these. A handbook can tell you a lot about a company. Has the company taken a lot of time in putting it together? Is it attractive? Most importantly, is it complete?

Many PBMs supply the player's manual to you at a low price for review before you have to make a decision to join the game. Take some time to read the handbook. A good handbook does several things. One, it should describe the game's setting, structure, and limits. Without an understanding of the game's background, you will be starting confused (which is rarely any fun).

Also, you should not be starting off blind. The handbook should describe, at least generally, what can and cannot be done within the game. Not all aspects of the game and its possibilities need to be revealed (much can and should be left to be discovered). However, a new player must be provided enough knowledge to survive and learn.

You should not be forced to waste time and money on actions that are not possible or to discover that the game is not what you were expecting. In general, the handbook must make the game as clear as possible in your mind.

Two, the handbook should also be inviting. You should feel comfortable with it. Ask yourself these questions: Does it address your concerns? Is it something you can refer back to time and again? Are there ample explanations and answers to your questions, such as company address, turn cost, restrictions, and always, always, a phone number? If there is no phone number, begin to suspect it and shy away automatically. I recommend against any company, PBM or otherwise, that does not provide a phone number.

Most good handbooks are illustrated. This is not a necessity, but it is attractive and shows that the creator was willing to do the best job possible. Don't rule out a PBM that has an unillustrated handbook, but I look more favorably on one that does.

Lastly, is the book durable? There is nothing worse than a handbook that falls apart after two readings. It will cost you to replace this book. You do not want to be ordering a new one every three months. Is the paper good quality? Is the cover protective? Does the ink smear? Is the binding secure? This may not seem like a big issue, but when your book is falling apart and unreadable, you'll become annoyed. You should expect to replace it once in a great while (I am in a PBM now where my book is starting to fall apart, but it has taken three years to happen).

Turn results: This is probably one of the biggest factors in making your decision. As I mentioned before, the kind of results you'll receive will vary depending on who moderates the game. A computer moderated game is usually going to provide very short answers. Computer-generated graphs and maps generally accompany each turn. These should be of good quality. A computer generated turn sheet is accurate (most of the time), to the point, and usually does not require a lot of interpretation. However, they tend to be short and usually don't have a lot of depth.

Human moderated turn results vary from game to game. Most are several pages long (four to 10 pages). They contain paragraphs of description concerning each of your orders or instructions. Your questions should be answered fully. Also, the better PBMs give you an added sense of realism due to the mod-

erator's role playing of non-player characters, nations, or whatever. This adds to the enjoyment. Situation descriptions should be in depth and detailed.

However, human moderated turn results are usually low on maps or graphs due to the time they take. Many provide maps only at extra cost or once some specified number of turns have elapsed. Such things take a large amount of time for the moderator to do. Some have overcome this with computerized spreadsheets, drawing programs, etc. If you find a PBM that offers such "luxuries" at no added price, grab it. They are rare, but wonderful.

Also, turn results should be returned to you *on time.* There is nothing more frustrating than waiting an extra several days or weeks for results. A company with consistently late results has problems. Whenever possible, check a PBM's turn around on results to see if it lives up to what it claims to deliver. Computer moderated games almost always are on time. But, the human moderated PBMs generally lag behind a week or two (depending on a large number of factors, including how long your orders are). If the speed of turn results matters a lot to you, check before joining the game.

Most PBMs offer a newsletter with the results of each turn. The newsletter provides hints, advice, and updates on what your neighbors are doing. The newsletter is sometimes essential to survival. Those PBMs that offer a newsletter show signs of superiority and interest about their players. The better the newsletter, usually the better the game and company.

Cost: The cost of PBMs vary as much as the cost of pizza: there are cheap ones and there are expensive ones, but the price doesn't always reflect how they taste!

First, find out how much each turn costs before joining. Is there an added cost for the rule book? Is there a separate registration fee? Are there any hidden costs? These are very important questions. Hidden costs are those you discover after joining the game. Some companies charge extra to do certain actions. So, a game that costs $2.50 may actually cost $5.00 when you count those hidden fees. Games that have hidden costs are almost always designed so you cannot accomplish much without taking the kinds of actions that cost extra. Watch out for such maneuvers—they are a mark of a dishonest company. If you ask a company for all its costs, they should reveal them to you. Failure to do so is deceptive marketing.

What is a fair price per turn? The computer moderated games are the cheapest because there is very little actual manpower involved. They usually run, on the average, between $2.50 and $3.50 per turn. Anything more than that should be justified somehow (an in-depth results sheet, for example). Like other things in life, don't pay for the name, pay for the game. A select few games have high prices based on their name attraction. Don't be fooled by this.

People moderated games are the most expensive. You are paying for a real person to give you individual attention, which means you are buying a large portion of somebody's time. On the average, these run between $4.00 and $6.50 per turn. If this sounds outrageous, consider that a human moderator probably spends on hour on each player every turn. Minimum wage (which is what fast-food cooks earn) is about four dollars an hour right now. Remember also, that you are paying for wear and tear on a person's computer, supplies (ink, paper, envelopes) and postage (which gets to be 75 cents or higher due to the volume of results you get with most human moderated games). When you look at it this, anything for five dollars a turn or lower is a pretty good deal.

Eventually, it all depends on how much you are willing to spend. If the high price of a human moderated game does not bother you, great. It is almost always worth the money. But if you're on a limited budget, then the computer moderator may be your best choice. For a computer moderated PBM, I usually stay in the realm of $2.50 per turn. For a half and half (partially computer, partially human), $3.00 is a fair price. I stay at around $5.00 for human moderated games, which is pretty reasonable.

When setting your budget, remember to include the costs of correspondence (stamps, envelopes, phone charges). You might also have miscellaneous expenses. For example, I do a players' newsletter for one PBM game and an alliance newsletter for another. This takes up more of my personal time and money, but it's all volunteer, not required. Of course, for some people, costs do not matter that much. I have known players who bought fax machines so they could fax in their turns. But, if you are on a limited budget, as most of us are, think carefully about the costs of each PBM before signing up.

Choosing a game: You should find a PBM that meets your needs and wants (as well as your wallet). Usually, if you find something you really like, you will find a way to work out the costs. Generally, a PBM game doesn't cost any more than what you'd pay for a traditional role playing game. Here are a two sample games for your consideration:

Galactic Prisoners

This is a game of exploration, economics, and political intrigue on a prison planet. Partially human and partially computer moderated, turn results are as fast as seven days. The cost per turn is $3.00 with some small fees for rare actions. The orders are semi-restrictive, and the results are clear and explained. Questions are allowed. It comes with a good handbook by a very reputable company. This game has received several commendations. The best thing this game offers beginners is a tremendous variety of ways to play. You can explore the planet, micromanage your economics, build networks of allies, or develop other personal specialties. Don't hesitate to ask questions about the game or your options.

Grandel, Inc.
P.O. 4386
Wilmington, DE 19807-0386

INS 2001

Take command of a nation in the future. Build military forces, research new technologies, conquer your neighbors, deal with aliens. Can you reach the stars? This is wholly people moderated. Turn results vary (average is four weeks). The cost per turn is $5.00 (no additional costs), and the orders are completely open, with very few restrictions. The game results are in depth, detailed, and usually several pages long. Questions are allowed. This is an excellent handbook, the best I've seen, by a reputable, expanding company. This game is perfect for the novice PBM player.

Andy Nyland
71 Nottingham Road
Syracuse, NY 13224

Into The Dark

Is There A Doctor in the House?

by James Lowder

You can't get any better	*****
Entertaining and enjoyable	****
There are worse films	***
Wait for cable	**
A waste of good tape	*

Dr. Tarr's Torture Dungeon

1972, 88 Minutes
Group 1
Director: Juan Lopez Moctezuma
Cast: Claude Brook, Ellen Sberman, Martin LaSalle
****1/2**

This very strange Mexican horror film is a mildly surreal version of the Poe tale, "The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Feather." In 19th century France, a reporter named LaBlanc (Claude Brook) visits the famous asylum of one Dr. Mayard. The place is run under the "soothing system," wherein the rule of conduct for the mental patients is simply "do as thou wilt."

As a result of Mayard's system, the asylum looks like something from Dante's *Inferno,* with lunatics creating their own mock army for patrolling the walls and men living in chimneys so their body heat can be gathered as an energy source. Get the idea that Mayard is no more sane than his patients? Well, you figured it out long before our reporter-hero does. When Monsieur LaBlanc catches on, it's already far too late for him to escape. "Mayard" imprisons him along with the asylum's rightful jailers.

The subplots running through the film are rather standard. LaBlanc falls for Mayard's niece, who may or may not be a patient. In the woods around the asylum, the three people who entered the grounds with the reporter are terrorized and hunted down.

The surreal aspects of the film are only a bit more interesting. LaBlanc is poisoned about halfway through the film, and we're invited along for his drug-induced visions and flashbacks. During the climactic banquet scene, dancers representing crows do a little interpretive number just before LaBlanc faces off against the cleverly deranged villain. The dance is rather silly, actually, since the crow costumes look like castoffs from a Duran Duran video.

Still, *Dr. Tarr's Torture Dungeon* is nowhere near as bad as its English title might suggest (its Mexican moniker is *La Masion de la Locura*). In fact, it's almost entertaining, which is about as close as I can get to recommending this strange film.

Dr. Cyclops

1940, 75 Minutes
Paramount
Director: Ernest Schoedsack
Cast: Albert Dekker, Thomas Colby, Janice Logan, Charles Halton
****

Okay, the dialogue in *Dr. Cyclops* sounds like Damon Runyon Theater, though not nearly as humorous (go rent *Guys and Dolls* if you do not know what I mean by this), but its outstanding sets and sharp, early Technicolor photography have rarely been matched. And as the quietly insane, bald-as-a-cue-ball Dr. Thorkel, Albert Dekker earned himself top honors in the Villain Hall of Fame.

When his eyes become so weak he can't use his microscope any longer—even with his Coke-bottle eyeglasses—famed biologist Alexander Thorkel summons a team of scientists to his laboratory deep in the heart of the Peruvian jungle. The party makes the arduous trip from the States, only to find Thorkel wants them to work only one day. Worse still, Thorkel will tell them almost nothing about the experiments they've been called upon to complete.

Naturally, the scientists get suspicious and snoop around Thorkel's camp. In SF movies, snoopers are often first in line to become guinea pigs for the mad doctor, and such is the case here. Thorkel catches them reading his journal, then tricks them into the chamber where he conducts his diabolical experiments. Next thing they know, they've been shrunk to the size of rats!

What follows is a wonderful shrunken-people-in-peril adventure, complete with all the trimmings—the doctor's huge cat, gigantic locked doors, and so on. The sets created for these scenes, and the use of split-screen photography, are great—even incredible, when you consider how little the high-tech, big-budget effects in *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* improved upon the work in *Dr. Cyclops.*

The title, by the way, comes from a blatant allusion to the episode in *The Odyssey* wherein Odysseus and his men outwit and blind the Cyclops, Polyphemus. Director Schoedsack also co-directed the classic *King Kong.* Will Garth wrote a novel, *Dr. Cyclops*, also released in 1940. I can't tell which is the basis for which, but I suspect the film is taken from the novel.

Doctor Butcher, M.D. (Medical Deviate)

1981, 81 Minutes
Aquarius
Director: Frank Martin
Cast: Ian McCulloch, Peter O'Neil, Alexandra Cole, Donald O'Brian
*****

Hoo ha. This time the title's a perfect reflection of this gross-out marathon, though its original release title, *Queen of the Cannibals,* more accurately represents the story.

After a rash of cannibalistic attacks in various U.S. cities, a journalist, an archaeologist, and a couple of other walking victims inexplicably go off to Southeast Asia to chat with the cannibal tribes there. It's never revealed exactly what they hope to accomplish there—other than becoming a tasty afternoon snack—but the plot never wanders anywhere near that sort of logic.

In the jungle, the doomed folks come across Dr. Obrero (Donald O'Brian), who offers guides and various other amenities. As you should expect, Obrero turns out to be a complete and utter lunatic. He's been supplying the cannibals with the leftovers from his experiments in creating mindless zombie slaves.

Anyway, after lots of graphic gut-munching and autopsy footage (provided by the folks who did the equally repulsive *Zombie*), one of the women explorers gets stripped by the cannibals and worshipped as their queen. She leads them in a revolt against Obrero, sadly saving the doltish hero. ❑

The Third Degree

There's No Time Like The Present

From the Gaming Casebook of Inspector Jeff Cisneros

One of my informants brought this little gem into my office. "Gee, Inspector, would ja take a look at this, huh?" I looked at the cover, gave the kid a pat on the head and a sawbuck, and told him to scram. Soon, in the privacy of my office, I gave it an intense grilling. This is what I dug out for you.

Millennium's End

I looked at the glossy cover and wondered what kid had been given license to use pencil sketches. While the art is sound for drafts, it is not clear enough for mass reproduction, and it gives you headaches if you try to discern details.

Beneath the surface there was even more cause for concern. Millennium's End is set in a post-Cold War world, although you must be persistent to find out this fact. (I was annoyed that the geopolitical situation of the game world was only cursorily explained in the back of the manual.)

The year is 1999 A.D., and the game's player characters are members of Blackeagle/Blackeagle, an international group of detectives, spies, paramilitaries, and guns for hire. They must weave their way through a maze of governmental agents, corporate entities, Third World dictators, and crime cartels to complete their missions.

There is no clear description of Blackeagle/Blackeagle's organizational structure or its credo (although it is an international agency). The only conclusion that I can draw is that BE/BE is just as amoral as the rest of the world in which it exists, including its antagonists. This aspect of the game troubles me. Although it's possible in a dark, gritty game for the heroes to be antiheroes, there must be some line drawn between the PCs and the bad guys. The line is either very gray in this game, or it doesn't exist. The PCs apparently "take on all comers"—the sample adventure in the book has them working for an organized crime boss.

In The Beginning?

Introductions are supposed to contain useful information, besides giving you a glimpse of the game world you are about to enter. The introduction of Millennium's End does neither. There is a useful explanation of game mechanics, but there's a note of self-importance that is jarring. "There are many aspects of the Millennium's End game design that make it superior to other role-playing systems," as the introduction says. Most gamebooks I have seen leave that kind of judgment to reviewers and purchasers.

Character Generation

This system's idea of "superiority," in my judgment, is overcomplexity of character design. The average generation time for a typical player character is 90 minutes and involves much page shuffling and looking for tables. You wind up with a character who has a staggering array of attributes, traits, skills, subskills, perks, *ad nauseam*. This results in a game which is numbers-driven and which slows the game to a frustrating pace. While a GM can always say, "The heck with it," and take a seat-of-the-pants approach to the game, this makes all the character design work meaningless. Worse, when a PC is reduced to a spreadsheet, genuine role playing takes a back seat.

The Good Stuff

This is not to say the game is a total loss. The designer, Charles Ryan, has included two very fine tools for any GM: the Attack Overlay System and the Clue Tree. The Attack Overlay System is a set of transparencies with printed target silhouettes, used to determine precise hit locations. Attack rolls choose a spot which may completely miss a target, or might hit in an unexpected location. This makes combat more realistic without the use of tables. I'd advise Mr. Ryan to market this tool separately and make it generic enough to use with any system.

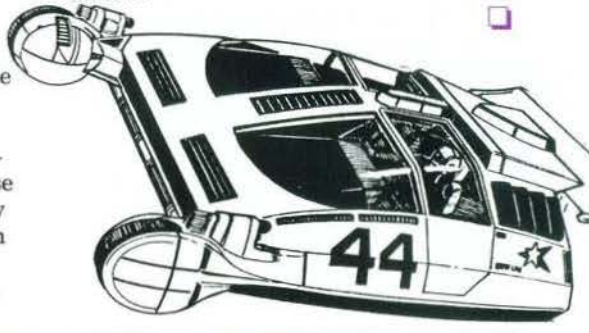
The other great tool is the Clue Tree. This is a method for plotting adventures that allows the players to determine the path of an investigation. This idea has existed for a long time; it took Mr. Ryan to make this idea useful.

The Bottom Line

I am not satisfied with Millennium's End. It makes too many questionable assumptions and relies on them. I find it hard to play and too oriented to numbers and combat. It also has a number of mistakes that could be easily found by another editor. I would encourage Mr. Ryan to make several changes to this system. He should keep in mind that playability depends on simplicity of game design. While realism is good, it is equally important to have a game where the mechanics don't get in the way. Also, "roll playing"—the use of dice and number tables—shouldn't take the place of role playing, especially in an espionage/detective world where character and environment are essential.

Millennium's End
Contemporary/Near Future Espionage/Detective RPG
Publisher: Chameleon Eclectic Entertainment
Price: $14.95
Designer: Charles Ryan
Product Info: Chameleon Eclectic
Post Office Box 1332
Centreville, VA 22020-1332
Send SASE

I would like to hear what you think about this column, and any suggestions you might have for game systems to review. Write to me in care of the Newszine. Now, hit the streets and be careful. ❑



The Everwinking Eye

Something Is Rotten At The Citadel Of The Raven

by Ed Greenwood

"Of all the lone cities of men in Faerun, none is so proud—or so dangerous—as the one called Zhentil Keep. Beware its reach, even when its frowning walls are far away."
Alagond, Sage of Tashluta,
A Guide To The Cold North
Year of Rising Winds

Our tour of the Realms continues with the unfolding history of Zhentil Keep—specifically, the great treachery that made it supreme in the Moonsea North; this is the matter of The Citadel of the Raven.

History of the Citadel

The Citadel of the Raven actually is a chain of ancient stone fortresses, linked by tunnels, low walls, and high stone bridges. Stone ravens were carved on its battlements, facing north (hence its name), and it has seemingly always been there and always known as The Citadel of the Raven. It was old when men of the Inner Sea first reached Dragon Sea and built now-lost Northkeep.

The abandoned keep served as a refuge for human and half-orc bandits, and several successive bands of them were routed out of it as the human presence in the North grew. Some sages believe the Citadel's existence proves there was once a grand human kingdom in the North, and that men are an older race than demi-humans and humanoids. Elminster and others hold that the Citadel is a remnant of a realm whose people fell back into barbarism under repeated orc and ogre attacks. Today, the survivors make up the "Horse Tribes" of The Ride. This realm's existence, Elminster contends, proves nothing about the age of mankind or human greatness in Faerun, only that human history in the Moonsea North goes back beyond reliable record.

All the human Moonsea cities had a hand in re-establishing the Citadel. The city governments realized they were dangerously exposed to raiding orcs and ogres. The terms of the parley that established the Citadel as a defensive stronghold called for all of the cities to send forces to the Citadel, and to use it as a base for patrolling Thar and The Ride, where fierce barbarian human tribes were proving increasingly dangerous to mining caravans.

Zhentil Keep made sure its forces outnumbered the soldiery of other cities in the Citadel by sending separate forces from Yulash, and from its own gates. Yulash had been formally granted independence just before the parley, but Zhentil Keep still covertly held the reins of power there.

A dedicated battle-captain, Galauntar Hawkhelm (LN hm F16) of Hillsfar, was elected Captain of the Citadel by vote of all the cities. He raised the watchful Raven of the North banner, and led the warriors who rode under it wisely and well.

Some of the cities sent malcontents and criminals to the Citadel just to be rid of them. These mavericks might have been troublesome, but Zhentarim wizards surreptitiously installed in the Citadel kept order by using their Art to subtly control them. Keeping their powers hidden from Hawkhelm, they also discovered which warriors were spies reporting back to their home cities, and made sure that these stalwarts ended up amid the battle casualties when Citadel warriors fought.

The Citadel's forces fought well against persistent ogre attacks, and were soon joined by fledgling adventuring bands hoping to make names for themselves. These adventurers served as explorers and scouts. The Citadel's fame, and good name, grew. Once its true worth came to be appreciated, its ancient, crumbling walls were strengthened.

A Good Idea Gone Sour

Shielded by the strong, diligent patrols of the commonly garrisoned Citadel, Zhentil Keep grew stronger yet. The city grew up, now, rather than out. Even the buildings in which common folk dwelt were tall, some having as many as six floors. They leaned one upon the other, pressed together in rows like so many cliffs towering over the narrow and gloomy streets below. Then, as now, crabweed and lichen grew on the cobbled streets, but there was not a tree to be found in the city.

Since the coming of the Zhentarim, the soldiery outnumbered all other inhabitants of the city. Military concerns ruled daily life; great iron gates were set into buildings all over the city

so that key streets could be closed off in case invaders reached the city interior (or, as some have said wryly, in case of a revolt).

Many angry and exaggerated tales surround "the treachery of Zhentil Keep," and Elminster tells me that, as far as he can tell, the Zhentarim coldbloodedly planned to seize the Citadel (and with it, much of the force of arms of the other Moonsea cities) from the beginning. At first, the Zhentarim were not strong enough to risk acting openly against all the other cities in the region—and later, too many mages and adventurers of power came to the Citadel for such a bold stroke to have much chance of succeeding. As the years passed, many in the Zhentarim advocated holding off on the planned seizure of the Citadel—the warriors were shielding Zhentil Keep itself so well that trade poured gold coins into more than a few laps in the city.

Eighty-odd winters passed, but at last came a time that seemed right. Someone gave orders, and the Zhentarim mages in the Citadel used poison and magic to slaughter the non-Zhentilar elements in the garrison, and then took the Citadel for their own. They acted when a large orc army was approaching the Citadel, and most of the warriors had sallied forth to do battle.

The orcs (possibly aided by Zhentarim magic, and probably goaded into the attack by Zhentarim magic or promises) prevailed in the fray. The defeated warriors, retreating to the Citadel, found the walls held against them. They were caught in the open and butchered.

Galauntar Hawkhelm (gray-haired despite liberal use of *potions of longevity*) rallied a small number of skilled warriors. They fought their way clear—to become The Knights of the North (See the FORGOTTEN REALMS Campaign Set). Hawkhelm was mortally wounded in the fray, and when night came, the banner of Zhentil Keep flew from the Citadel's battlements.

Zhentil Keep had planned to crush the armies of the Moonsea cities with this stroke and render them defenseless. With military resistance smashed, a Zhentarim-ruled empire was expected to follow swiftly. Zhentilar troops set out for Melvaunt, Thentia, Yulash, and Daggerdale.

The Zhentarim, however, had overlooked their neighbors' wariness and the might of adventurers in the area. The majority of Melvaunt's troops, brought to the field to resist the orcs, marched east in good order, heading home.

Cormyr sent troops to Daggerdale, and Sembia sent mercenaries and much coin to Hillsfar, intending to stop Zhentil Keep from simply rolling over the Dalelands.

Various lone mages and adventuring bands administered sharp defeats to Zhentilar troops all around the Moonsea shores.

Several Zhentarim mages operating undercover in Sembian cities were suddenly unmasked and very publicly dismembered; it was made clear that their identities and activities had been known for some time.

Zhentil Keep suddenly learned prudence, and a time of uneasy peace began. The Zhentarim fought a few skirmishes around Yulash and Voonlar to remind everyone that Zhents were too powerful to trifle with, ignore, or try to blockade. However, they ceased to depend on open warfare to achieve their ends and established extensive networks of often-unwitting agents to further their aims and interests. Their new policy depended on corruption and local domination by mages.

Little is known of the internal politics of the Zhentarim at this time. Elminster was occupied with other matters (traveling extensively about the planes, I gather) and was absent from the Inner Sea lands for much of the time. The fledgling local organization of Harpers were kept busy protecting common folk from the depredations of Zhentilar soldiers and Zhent-sponsored orc raiding bands. Perhaps more will be said of this dark time later.

Recent History

Thirty or so winters ago, Harlshoon, a warrior of renown, became First Lord of Zhentil Keep. His chief rival among the city's Lords was Calkontor, a skilled mage.

Harlshoon's sons, Asmuth and Manshoon, were a pair of ruthless, depraved "swashblades" who terrorized the common folk with cruel pranks and destructive roistering. Their chief friend and companion in this was Chess, son of Calkontor.

Both Harlshoon and Calkontor sent their sons forth into the world (armed with swords and much gold) to learn its ways and prove themselves.

When the sons were gone, Calkontor poisoned Harlshoon and then taunted the dying Lord, who mastered his weakening body enough to stun Calkontor with a hurled chair. Harlsoon threw his dazed rival from a high window to his death on the cobbles far below. Thus both Lords passed, and lesser Lords, the mage Theilon Greencloak and the priest Ulsan Baneservant, came to power.

Far away, the journeying Lord-Princes (this is the Zentish title for a Lord's heir who has not yet come to power) came upon a barrow-tomb which their lore readings told them would hold, among other things, a magical blade of great power. Unfortunately for the Lord-Princes, three Harpers were spending the night inside the tomb. They were seeking the sword, too, and planned to take it with all due ceremony so as not to despoil the tomb. In the battle that followed, Asmuth was blinded, Manshoon's right hand was blown away into nothingness when he hastily snatched up the sword. Chess, unharmed, fled with his companions into the night. Asmuth was all but helpless and had to be led on his mount.

Manshoon was crippled himself, however, and could no longer hold a blade. He resolved to master magic, having seen its power in play at the tomb.

Chess, Asmuth, and Manshoon wandered until one night they found an encamped company of adventurers. Most lay asleep. The three Zhents overcame the watch and slaughtered the hapless adventurers. Among their gear, Manshoon found a wand and a spell book. He soon traded the wand for regeneration magic for his hand, but secretly kept the spell book.

After a few more dangerous brigand-like adventures, the Zhents began the long trip home, and in an inn still far from the Moonsea learned of the deaths of their fathers. Manshoon resolved to dispose of his brother before they reached Zhentil Keep, and managed to arrange Asmuth's fatal fall into a gorge from a narrow bridge one misty morning.

Other events had unfolded in their absence. The Masked Wizards of Ankhalus (a brotherhood of evil mages who dwelt in a small keep in Thar) had attacked several Zhentarim, and Theilon Greencloak had led the Zhentarim in a retaliatory attack.

The Battle of the Masks ensued, in which both sides perished to a man, destroyed by the magics they had released. The Citadel Ankhalus was reduced to a smoking ruin—and in Zhentil Keep, the Lord Ulsan was left alone

holding power, the other Lords thoroughly terrified of his cold, depraved cruelty and the power of the priesthood he commanded.

When Chess and Manshoon returned to the city, priests promptly tried to assassinate them (on Ulsan's orders). Good fortune and Manshoon's emerging magic saved them.

Manshoon struck back. In a hasty scheme with a childhood friend, Fzoul Chembryl (now a high-ranking priest of Bane), Manshoon overthrew and slew Ulsan. Mindful of his exposed position at the pinnacle of power in Zhentil Keep, Manshoon set about organizing a secret organization that would support him and hold his rule over Zhentil Keep secure. Many priests of Bane joined this network, against the will of the then current High Imperceptor of Bane, who was ultimately forced to flee the city and go into hiding to save his own life. Many Zhent wizards who lacked power and scruples also joined.

Manshoon cold-bloodedly played off the wizards, one against another, and used knowledge and items they acquired in their adventures to further his own researches, so that he always maintained his own might-of-Art at a higher level of power than the other wizards in the organization.

Manshoon also arranged a secret alliance to defend himself against treachery from within his organization. This deal was with Xantriph, a beholder who inhabited a magically levitating hollow rock that floated above the wilderlands south of Zhentil Keep. The rock became known as The Temple In The Sky. There Xantriph spoke to Bane worshippers (who came riding hippogriffs, or worse) as The Voice of Bane, directing them to do whatever Manshoon desired. (The god Bane, amused and intrigued, raised no hand against this.)

The floating Temple became a base for Zhentilar patrols and for a network of men and small skulking creatures that Xantriph established to spy up on Zhentil Keep's citizens, including the priesthood of Bane and the ranks of the Zhentarim. Xantriph in turn reported interesting findings to Manshoon, and he was quick to remove serious threats and rivals when alerted by the eye tyrant.

Xantriph was ultimately slain by The Knights of Myth Drannor and replaced in the Temple by a lesser beholder, Xulla. Manshoon allied himself with another beholder, Manxam, who became his spymaster and co-conspirator. Manxam is said to be younger, but far wiser than Xantriph was, and is said to have become the true power in Zhentil Keep.

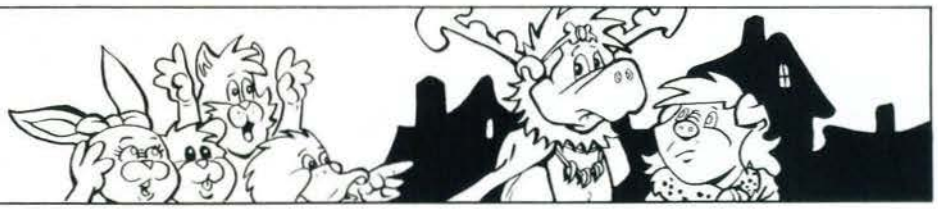
Today, Zhentil Keep is firmly in the grip of the Zhentarim (despite rebellious tendencies on the part of some of the now-powerless Lords of the city). The Zhentilar armies have become soldiers of the Zhentarim; they are loyal to the brotherhood rather than to the city. The head of the Dark Network of the Zhentarim, the archmage Manshoon, is First Lord of Zhentil Keep and rules the Council of Lords with the aid of the High Priest of Bane Fzoul Chembryl, much as Zhentar ruled with the help of Brest long ago.

The Lord Chess has become a cruel, fat, foolish fop, famous for his decadent ways. He often makes jests and executes pranks, playing on his friendship with Manshoon, but very few of the other Lords of Zhentil Keep dare to act or speak against Manshoon or Fzoul in any way. In return, Manshoon has saddled Chess with the daily administration of the city.

Our space runs short; we'll look again at the Zhentarim next time around. Elminster reminds us to be wary when around wizards; one never knows where a Zhentarim is lurking—or when a powerful sorcerer is simply in a bad mood. Either can be fatal to bystanders (he assures me there is no such thing as an "innocent bystander").

BLOODMOOSE™
AND COMPANY

by Gary M. Williams © 1991



SO WHERE'S THAT SQUIRREL THAT'S ALWAYS WITH YOU? IS HE COMIN' LATER?
YEAH! I'D KINDA LIKE TO GET HIS AUTOGRAPH TOO!!
GARY M. Williams ©1991

Conventions

TWINCON '93, May 29-31
Minneapolis, MN
Enjoy the upper midwest's premier game convention at the Thunderbird Hotel in Minneapolis. There will be dozens of role playing, war game, and miniatures tournaments. Many Network events will be featured. Our Mystery Quest interactive game will let hundreds of players compete in a convention-wide event. Meet our friendly guests of honor, enjoy free soft drinks and snacks in our hospitality suite. Registration is $30 with no game fees. Contact: TWINCON 93, P.O. Box 8010, Minneapolis, MN 55408.

Illinicon '93, June 4-6
Urbana, IL
The Urbana Gaming House invites you to the University of Illinois campus, Hendrick House dormitory. Network events will include the AD&D® game and Shadowrun. Other events include Call of Cthulhu, Battletech, Star Fleet Battles, and many more. Don't miss the open gaming, free movies, game auction, miniature painting contest, prizes, or dealers. Low cost accommodations (air conditioned) are available. There will be on-site food service and free parking. General admission is $5, $3 more gets you into all the games. GMs needed. For information send a SASE to: Urbana Gaming House, 904 West Green, Box 1801, Urbana, IL 61801; (217)328-8053 (early evenings).

ConMan, June 4-6
Manchester, NH
Manchester's first role playing convention will be held at the Howard Johnsons on Queen City Ave. ConMan will feature an assortment of RPGs and board games, and a live-action RPG. Other features include a benefit for the New Hampshire AIDS foundation, a miniature contest, an art show, a Monopoly tournament, game demonstrations, a vendors room, and a demonstration by the local SCA chapter. The hotel is offering special rates if you mention the convention. Pre-registration is $15. For information please write: ConMan, P.O. Box 842, Manchester, NH 93101.

CapitalCon IX, June 12-13
Springfield, IL
Join the Springfield Gamers Association for CapitalCon IX, bigger and better than ever. Network events include multi-round AD&D game and Shadowrun events and single-round AD&D game, Shadowrun, MARVEL SUPER HEROES game, and Chill. Other events include Battletech, Warhammer 40K, Napoleonics, Civil War, a painting contest, the biggest and best auction and vendor area this side of the GEN CON® Game Fair. All for only $10. For information contact: John Holtz, 400 East Jefferson Street, Springfield, IL 52702; (217)753-2656.

Wyvercon '93, June 18-20
Mount Vernon, WA
This event will feature a Network AD&D game, numerous other games, dealers, miniatures, and a painting contest. Tent and RV spaces are available first-come, first-served. Day care and food are available on site. Referees welcome. All proceeds go to benefit the Skagit Valley Food Banks. For information write: Wyvercon '93, % S.V.G.A., P.O. Box 2325, Mt. Vernon, WA 98273.

Glathricon '93, June 18-20
Evansville, IN
The Evansville Gaming Guild invites you to the Executive Inn in Evansville. Network events include AD&D game Grand Masters, Masters, and Feature, Shadowrun, Chill, Paranoia, and the Joe Martin AD&D game Benefit for the American Cancer Society. There will be many other events, plus an art show and auction, dealers room, miniatures contest, masquerade, and panel discussions. Artist guest of honor is Larry Elmore. For information write: Glathricon, % Evansville Gaming Guild, P.O. Box 15414, Evansville, IN 47716; (812)477-9508.

Atlanticon, June 18-20
Baltimore, MD
Join us at the Baltimore Convention Center for the East Coast's oldest gaming convention. Industry personalities, product designers. and exhibitors from around the country will attend. There will be a greatly expanded dealers' area and game events will focus on the 1993 "Where Worlds Collide" theme. Games will include Network events, all genres of RPGs, miniatures of all sorts, and traditional and novel board games. Pre-registration is $20 for the weekend. Write: ADF Inc., P.O. Box 91, Beltsville, MD 20704; (301)345-1858.

Michicon '93, June 18-20
Southfield, MI
About 1,800 gamers are expected for this convention, which will be held in the air-conditioned pavilion at the Southfield Civic Center. There will be 75 board game tournaments, 60 role playing events, and 40 miniatures tournaments. About 30 dealers will sell games. There is plenty of free parking. Food prepared by a local restaurant will be available on site. Pre-registration for all three days is $16. For information write: Metro Detroit Gamers, M-93 prereg, P.O. Box 656, Wyandotte, MI 48193; during the day call Barry Jensen (313)953-2125. During the evening call Mike Bartnikowski (313)928-7744. For dealer information call Mike Scopone (313)421-6402.

Origins '93, July 1-4
Fort Worth, TX
The Tarrant County Convention Center is the site for this national gaming event. Features include an art show, seminars, games auction, 200-booth exhibit hall and more than 500 gaming events. The Network will offer seven tournaments: three-round AD&D game Feature, two-round AD&D game Special, AD&D game Masters/Grand Masters, two-round AD&D game Benefit, AD&D game Living City (members only), DARK SUN™ setting Feature, and a GAMMA WORLD® game Feature. For convention information contact: Gemco, P.O. Box 609, Randallstwon, MD 21133; (410)298-3135. The Network needs Origins judges! To volunteer, contact: Rob Peacock, 1016 W. Stassney Lane #136, Austin, TX 78745.

CubeCon '93, July 23-24
Butler, PA
Come one, come all to the Butler County Community College, Cranberry Campus. The BCCC gaming guild is proud to sponsor CubeCon '93. Events will include Network tournaments such as the AD&D 2nd edition game, MARVEL SUPER HEROES, and Shadowrun. Other events will include warhammer 40K, Star Trek, micro armor, and more. There will be a dealer area and prizes. For information write: CubeCon '93, P.O. 1203, Butler, PA 16003-1203; or call Jason Lent (412)898-2959.

GEN CON 26 Game Fair, August 19-22
Milwaukee, WI
This is it—the grandaddy of all gaming conventions. If you've never attended a Game Fair, you cannot image the scope of this four-day gaming blowout. The schedule will include more than 1,000 games, dozens of seminars, book signings, a cavernous exhibit hall, a huge games auction, manufacturers' demonstrations, product giveaways, a massive art show, costume competition, and lots more. The Network will offer its annual Wednesday night members meeting, skit competition and charity auction (which usually features a very large, very bright, framed photo of a well-known Network member doing something unforgettable), Friday morning breakfast and awards ceremony, and loads of seminars and tournaments. The Network welcomes all judges and volunteers—see the form bound into this issue. For convention information write: The GEN CON Game Fair, P.O. Box 756, Lake Geneva, WI 53147; (414)248-3625.

This Just In

Tournament results for the following conventions were recorded at HQ between January 15th and February 6th, 1993:

Americon 2
Armadillo
Day of Games
Dragon Flight
Game Zone 1
GEnie Decathlon
Kettering Game Fair
London Con 2
Necronomicon
OKon
Pentacon VIII
Role Con '92
Sooner Con
Spring Con '92
Texicon
Tri Con III
Watsific
Wintercon '93
W.S.U. Game Fair
The Club Meeting
The Con With No Name
First Coast Comi Con
Game Keeper Fantasy 1
Sarasota & Manatee Fantasy Fair

If you played a Network event at a con not on this list, check with the convention organizer to see if the results have been sent to HQ.

Note that conventions run in **Europe** and **Australia** do not appear on this list.

Classifieds

Connecticut: I am looking to join a gaming group. I play Runequest, both versions of the AD&D® game, Champions, Shadowrun, and Star Frontiers. I am willing to learn new games. I am willing to travel to games. Jason Bennett, 231 N Whittlesex Ave. Ext., Wallingford, CT 06492; (203)269-5780.

Indiana: Two gamers, both in our 30s, in the northwest section of the state would like to join a group to play the AD&D game regularly. Contact: R. Fox, 449 Willow Lane, Dyer, IN 46311. All responses will be answered.

Maine: I am a 15-year-old gamer seeking other gamers of similar are in my area: Waterboro, Limerick, Alfred, Newfield, Shapleigh, and Lyman. I like to play the AD&D 2nd edition game in the DRAGONLANCE® setting. My friends and I are willing to learn any other games. Also, I am looking for a copy of The Manual of the Planes in good condition. Please contact: Paul Holbrook, HCR 81 Box 7705, West Newfield, ME 04095; (207)793-4016.

New Jersey: *Rotisserie League Baseball:* Player wanted for Ultra League in the northern/central area. Established, eight-year league needs new blood. Write: John Lynch, 929 Lincoln Blvd., Middlesex, NJ 08846-2514.

New York: Attention gamers in the Hudson Valley region: I am interested in compiling a gamers listing to help you meet gamers. Being included on this list will be free; distribution will be through area conventions and possibly through the mail. I ask all Network members for suggestions. Write: Spencer Hart, RD 1 Box 636, New Hampton, NY 10958.

Oklahoma: Players Guild of Central Oklahoma Guildmaster Craig Petillo is requesting your help in circulating the '93 Gamers' Survey. The information gathered will help to plan an all-gaming convention and trade show within Oklahoma in the near future. For information please send a SASE to: PGCO, % Gamers' Survey, P.O. Box 770396, Oklahoma City, OK 73177. Thanks for your support.

Oklahoma: The Players Guild of Central Oklahoma is now publishing Networks, a bi-monthly newsletter. The project has the grand goal of improving communication between gamers in Oklahoma and the surrounding states. If you are interested in promoting your convention or gaming event to gamers in the southwestern U.S.A., please send your information and a SASE to Networks, % PGCO, P.O. Box 770396, Oklahoma City, OK 73177.

Wisconsin/General: I am looking for a few good players in the Walworth-Bigfoot area. I prefer players interested in AD&D 2nd edition game and the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting, but I will try any role playing game. Any race, gender, or species welcome. Also, I'd like to buy FORGOTTEN REALMS accessories FR1, FR2, and FR3 in good condition. Contact: Kerry Arntz at (414)275-3832 between 4 pm and 9 pm, Monday through Saturday.

General: Dragonslayers Unlimited is looking for new members. We are a registered Network club with more than 60 members in the USA, Australia, and Sweden. We are dedicated to playing games by mail; many club members offer AD&D games, DAWN PATROL® games, Arcanum, Heroes Unlimited, and others. If you appreciate play-by-mail gaming, Dragonslayers Unlimited might be for you. Write: Jil Conway, Rt. 6, 3001 Johnson Lane, Columbia, MO 65202-8510. All inquiries welcome.

General: Papyrus, a (very) small-press fanzine published by and for a group of pen pals, is looking for some growth through exchange. We would like to trade subscriptions or single issues with other fanzines or club newsletters. We also would like to solicit submissions for Papyrus (the only payment we can offer is a copy of the fanzine). Papyrus covers all genres and gaming topics. Write: Papyrus, % Nick Parenti, 2815 Lund Ave. #6, Rockford, IL 61109.

General: I'd like to buy TSR 9179 GDQ 1-7 Queen of the Spiders; Gamemaster Publications GM1, GM2, GM6+; Companions (Islandian Campaign) 40301 Sacrifices to the Orc Lord and more recent modules; Companion Pieces/Places of Mystery; POLYHEDRON 1-12, 22-26, 30-34, 40; and any Judges Guild products. Please send price lists to Craig Davis, 3510 Burrows Ave., Fairfax, VA 22030; (703)352-0751.

General: Please send your comments or suggestions regarding the Network Members Advisory Committee to: MAC, % 54° 40′ Orphyte, Inc. P.O. Box 2108, Naperville, IL 60567-2108.

General: I am looking for players to start a play-by-mail game in Spanish. Si español, I am also look for pen pals anywhere in the world. I will answer all letters. Gustavo Rodriguez, M-388, P.O. Box 020010, Miami, FL 33102.

General: Original Chill game products available while they last! Original base game ($30), Scoucebooks ($12), Modules ($8), and Black Morn Manor tile/board game ($18). 54° 40′ Orphyte, Inc. P.O. Box 2108, Naperville, IL 60567-2108.

General: *For sale:* Unopened copies of Robotech-The New Generation volume one ($40) and Volume Eight ($50). Christopher Baldi, 22 Temple Tr., Hopatcong, NJ 07843

General: Role Players Connection is a new newsletter and phone directory from New Horizons. If you would like your first name and phone number listed in the RPC Directory, please send your name, area code, phone number, city, state, and your role playing interests to: New Horizons, % David Loftin, 1083 Laurel Lane, Convers, GA 30207. Keep an eye out in your favorite gaming magazine for our ad. Tell all your gaming friends to send in your phone numbers, too. This offer is not limited to Network members. We need your help to make finding other role playing gamers easier.

General: Opinionated know-it-all wants to "discuss" the AD&D game, D&D® game, and other subjects with others who have firm convictions. Those with runaway typewriters and divergent opinions preferred, but I'll answer all letters. Also looking for postal adventurers interested in spending an evening in a (used to be) quiet inn. Modified AD&D 2nd edition game rules. First-through third-level PCs. No charge. Write: David Argall, 1300 Ballista, La Puente, CA 91744.

General: I am a 17-year-old male player/GM with seven years' experience. I play Toon, the AD&D 2nd edition game, the FORGOTTEN REALMS, RAVENLOFT™, and AL-QADIM™ settings. I'd like to share gaming experiences with pen pals world-wide. Also, if anyone in Sunnyvale, CA is looking for a gamer to join them in a club. I'm a good player and always try my best. I never give up on an adventure. If you don't have a club, maybe we could start one. Please write: Mauricio Soza, 364 West Olive Apt. #8, Sunnyvale, CA 94086.

General: I am searching for boxed set #3 of the MARVEL SUPER HEROES miniatures. (This set includes Spider-Man's alien suit and the Scarlet Witch.) I prefer an unpainted set. If you'd like to sell your set, please contact: Jeremy Stoffen, 3573 270th Ave., Keokuk, IA 52632; (319)524-1919.

General: Prison inmate with no source of income would like ideas and information on role playing games that doe not need dice or expensive reference materials (handbooks, modules, or source books). I am interested in playing by mail, but I don't have access to any reference material or old characters. Anyone who can help me please write: Owen Rhodes, #94551, Varner Box 60021, Grady, AR 71644-0600.

General: I am trying to collect tables for RPGs. I'll take critical hit and fumble tables, of course, but I'm also looking for anything else for any game system, especially fantasy, that you have found useful or have created yourself. I'll trade my creations for yours: potions, spells, creatures, traps, etc. Tim Joyce, 15522 Dobson Ave., Dolton, IL 60419-2709; (708)849-7475.

General/Trading Cards: *For Sale:* AD&D™ comics 1-36, all in very fine or better condition, AD&D trading cards series 1991 and 1992, FORGOTTEN REALMS™ comics 1-16, 21, 24, and 25 in very fine or better condition. DRAGONLANCE™ comics 2 and 3 in (new/mint). Original RAVENLOFT module I6 and Maztica boxed (new/mint—both have some highlighting). Original Dungeon Masters Guide near mint). DRAGONLANCE Adventures hardcover (used). *Wanted:* DRAGON® Magazine 160, M1 Blood Stone, FORGOTTEN REALMS Adventures hardcover, AD&D trading cards 1991 series I and II 108, 251, 299, and 738-745; also some 1992 series I and II cards. Send offers or trade lists to: Robert Morris Jr., 465 E. Third St., Harbor Springs, MI 49740.

Trading Cards: Cards for sale. Send SASE for list of non-sport sets and singles, including TSR cards. Steve Munn, Market Station, Box 2084R, Niagara Falls, NY 14301.

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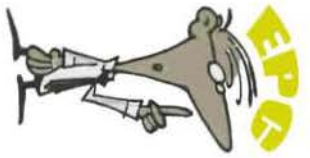

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